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The Name above every Name

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The Name above every Name

AND OTHER SERMONS.

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BY

CHARLES D. BELL, D.D.,

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AUTHOR OF "NIGHT SCENES OF THE BIBLE," "THE SAINTLY CALLING."

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TO

MY PARISHIONERS,

IN TENDER MEMORY OF THE DEAD,

AND IN LOVING REGARD FOR THE LIVING,

THIS VOLUME OF SERMONS

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

PREFACE.

THE sermons contained in this volume were preached in the ordinary course of my ministry, and are printed, with some slight verbal alterations, as they were delivered. Many of the members of my kind and generous-hearted congregation have often asked me to publish sermons from which they said they derived instruction and profit; and though I delayed from time to time to do so, I have at length consented to their wish. I am well aware that a sermon read can never be quite the same thing as a sermon preached; a book can never equal in power the spoken word. The press can, therefore, never take the place of the pulpit. But if the following pages help those who listened to them to recall sermons which, under God, were to them a source of pleasure and profit, and if others, who never saw my face or heard my voice, should chance to read them with interest and benefit, I shall have an ample reward.

I have great faith in the influence of the Christian preacher, and by no means think that a sermon, if it is to instruct and impress, to reach the heart and touch the conscience, and to plead with man for God, can be compressed into ten minutes, and looked upon as of little moment; for if it is to prove itself, what it is intended to be, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God unto salvation," and something more than a simple exhortation, it must be regarded as of supreme importance. Nothing can supersede it in the conversion of men to God, and the extension of Christ's kingdom in the world. This, and not architecture however beautiful, or music however fine, or ceremonial however splendid, whatever worth these may have as accessories to worship, can bring the soul face to face with God.

I place the greatest value on the theology of the Reformation, which is the theology of the Evangelical School; and I regard this as no rigid, unelastic system, but as having capacities for adapting itself to all the ethical problems of our age, and for applying the eternal ideas that underlie the Christian faith to all varieties of conduct.

The sermons here collected are not controversial, but practical, though some touch on subjects of earnest discussion at the present time, and which are regarded in this volume from the Evangelical standpoint. In these days of theological restlessness,

I believe that the same truths which were the strength of Evangelical Churches in times past, and had a singular fascination for some of the best and greatest men that ever lived, making them strong to do and mighty to suffer for Christ's sake and the gospel's, are the strength of Evangelical Churches to-day, and lie at the root of motives which make those who hold them in spirit and in truth, pure and upright and true. The value of these truths is known by the fruits which they bear. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles."

C. D. BELL.

The Rectory, Cheltenham,
March, 1892.

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The Name above every Name.

"And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His Name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."—MATT. i. 21.

THIS is the announcement of the most wonderful event in the history of the world. Joseph receives from the angel of the Lord a direct, personal, living revelation of the Incarnation of the Eternal Son and its object. Many prophecies were about to receive their accomplishment. "The Word was to be made flesh." "The great mystery of godliness" was now to be revealed, and God was in very deed to dwell with men. No wonder that the heavens were stirred, that a new star shone in the firmament, that angel-forms, by the light of their wings, turned the night into day, and that angel-voices sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." The glory which had passed from the earth was about to be restored, and Jesus had come to "save His people from their sins."

It is on the meaning contained in the name "Jesus" that I am about to speak to you. "What's in a name?" Commonly little or nothing. It is simply an appellation to distinguish one person from another;

but the name "Jesus" is pregnant with blessed meaning, and comprehends much that is profitable for consideration.

For, in the first place, His is the only saving name. "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."

There is a grand intolerance about the gospel as well as a gracious and infinite love. It is exclusive as well as inclusive. There is obstruction and limitation as well as invitation and welcome. "There is but one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus." There is but one only Saviour of God's elect—He who puts forth this remarkable claim: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." The gospel proposes to us but one method of salvation. It has no such message as this—that men will be saved if they believe a lie, provided they only believe it earnestly and sincerely, and hold their belief earnestly and sincerely to the end. And why? Because a lie cannot save. A lie can only pervert, mislead, and destroy the soul; and they who believe a lie, and reject the truth, do so to their own peril. We hear much of earnestness at the present day, as if earnestness, even when separated from truth, were all that is needed in the matter of religion. But earnestness, if not united to truth, hurts more than it blesses, inasmuch as it lends the force of misdirected zeal to error. "It compasses sea and land to make one proselyte; and, when he is made, makes

him tenfold more the child of hell than he was." It is only "the truth that can make us free." Falsehoods, like meteors that flash across the firmament, eventually go out in the darkness. But truth is immortal. It never dies, nor can it be killed. The sword cannot slay it; fire cannot burn it; water cannot quench it; it lives after the martyr has expired at the stake, after the confessor has been drowned beneath the wave. Brethren, with all solemnity, I affirm that the Name of Jesus is the one all-prevailing Name. No other may be added to it—not the name of the highest saint or of the brightest angel that bows before the throne of God. In the high matter of salvation, our language must be this, as we turn from every other refuge to the Saviour, "My tongue shall speak of Thy righteousness only;" "Thou art all my salvation and all my desire."

Oh, the perverseness, the folly, of turning to any one else—to anything else—since the Word was made flesh, "for the very purpose of seeking and saving that which was lost"—since God gave Him the name "Jesus," because He should "save His people from their sins"!

It is wonderful to think of this Name. Eighteen hundred years ago the angel said to Joseph, "Thou shalt call His Name Jesus," and to-day what Name is there so great as this? What other so enduring? It has lived through anarchy and revolution, through storm and change, decay and death. Other names since then, and many of them accounted great—

names which held the world in awe, which blanched the cheek, and made men tremble—have passed into oblivion ; but this Name is as fresh as ever, and far more powerful than it was of old. It is the earliest name that Christian parents breathe into their children's ears ; the first they teach them to lisp, as they lie in their lap, or stand at their knee. It is the gracious Name woven into all our prayers, and mingling with all our praises. It is the great Name which many a learned and holy man has felt it his highest privilege, his most sacred duty, to proclaim. It is the precious Name which the evangelist takes to the poorest and most wretched courts of our cities and towns, knowing that it can lift the burden of sin and sorrow from the soul, and fill it with peace and purity and strength. It is the all-powerful Name which the Church is occupied in sending to the farthest places of the earth, that the nations "may be turned from darkness to light, and the power of Satan unto God." It is the hallowed Name in which the civilized peoples of the globe enact their laws, crown their kings, fight their battles, and celebrate their victories. It is the Divine Name on whose authority we sanctify the dearest relationships of life, baptize the child at the font, bless the union at the marriage altar, and commit our dead to the grave. And, brethren, wherever this Name is proclaimed, it is inspiring faith, hope, and love. Many who hear it place their trust in the Saviour, and look to Him as the Source of all blessing, the Well-spring of all joy. They believe that He will give them

eternal life, will strengthen their feebleness, lighten their troubles, and sanctify their sorrows. Men of all ranks, countries, and ages, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, old and young, feel the power of Christ's gospel, are influenced by His Spirit, and constrained by His love.

There is a well-known picture of the Saviour by a German artist, called "Christus Consolator," where—the centre figure of the picture—Christ is dispensing His gifts to the sinful and sorrowing, the sick and the diseased, to the poor, the broken-hearted, and the bereaved. Wistful faces turn to Him with the expectant gaze of hope, and eager eyes look into His tender and sympathizing countenance. The work expresses the attractive power of Christ; how He brings men to His feet to trust, to worship, to adore. It illustrates the words which He on one occasion spake: "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die." Men of all classes and characters, men from all countries and climes, have been drawn to His cross, "with the cords of a man, and the bands of love," and have laid themselves down captives at His feet. And He is ever winning fresh victories. The drawing is going on. God is "adding to the Church daily such as shall be saved." Christendom is being filled with the glory of His person and character and work. Her best and most gifted sons delight to magnify His love, and to do honour to His grace. Her poets, inspired by the transcendent beauty of His life, and the

sublime grandeur of His death, have used their rich gifts to praise His name in many a noble poem, tender hymn, and melodious psalm. Her painters have delighted to portray the events of His wondrous history, and have shown us Christ in the manger, Christ in the temple, Christ on the mount, Christ on the cross, and Christ in the grave. Her musicians have caught their loftiest inspirations from the sufferings and triumphs of the Messiah; and the great masters of harmony, when singing His praises, have made the heart thrill, and the pulse beat high, and have brought down to earth something of the blessedness of the skies. Thus there is nothing which His "Name" has not hallowed and glorified. The commonest things of earth have now a higher and holier meaning than they ever had before, or ever could have had without Him. "A virtue has flowed out of Him" into everything He has touched. Has not labour become nobler since He sat at Nazareth, on the carpenter's bench? Has not childhood become more sacred since "He took little children into His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them"? Has not woman been elevated since He lay in a woman's arms, and was clasped to a woman's heart? Has not penitence become more holy since the Magdalen fell at His feet to wash them with her tears, and wipe them with the hairs of her head? Has not sorrow been more heavenly since the "Man of Sorrows" wept bitter tears, cried out in the agony of His bloody sweat, and suffered on Calvary? Has not death changed its character since He died, and

robbing the arch-fiend of his sting, and turning the tide of battle, wrested from the last enemy the victory? Has not the grave become brighter since He lay in the rocky tomb, under linen napkin and shroud? The very cross itself, that "accursed tree," that symbol of shame, has been transfigured into an emblem of all that is dearest to the Christian heart, or that is holiest in the Christian faith. Nay, not only things, but persons have been transfigured by contact with Jesus. Sinners have become saints; fishermen, apostles; publicans, disciples. A persecuting and blaspheming Saul has been changed into a holy and loving Paul. It may be recorded of all who drew near, "As many as touched Him were made perfectly whole." "As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His Name."

And has He lost His power, as some would have us believe? Or are men losing their trust in Him? Is "the sea of faith" no longer "at the full"? Do we hear only the long melancholy roar of the retreating tide, which soon threatens to leave the world bare and naked of any belief at all? I will not believe it. Though some, as St. Paul says, "*will* err concerning the truth, nevertheless the foundation of the Lord standeth sure,"—and on this impregnable rock we plant our feet,—"having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." As long as there is sin in the world, and sorrow, broken hearts and wounded spirits; so long as there are chambers of sickness and death-beds, so long will "the Name of Jesus"

have power. The saving wonders wrought by Him who bears the Name, are continued to-day. They are continued in the thousands of assemblies which are met in toiling cities, crowded towns, and scattered villages; in solitary hamlets, and on heath-clad moors, and in lonely ships ploughing the mighty deep. Everywhere, where men of like passions with ourselves have gathered to worship God, Christ has thrown open the doors of heaven, and has sent down His Spirit to renew, to sanctify, to strengthen, and to console. Many shall be born again to-day into the kingdom of God, and be saved from their sins, and, receiving pardon, shall be given power to wrestle down strong temptations, and shall go forth on the morrow, inspired with a new hope and girt with a new strength, to be purer, better, wiser, more humble, more peaceful; and all the week shall be brighter because of the worship of "His Name," on this His own day.

Brethren, "the Name" keeps its place in the minds and hearts of men. The deeds that He did, the life that He lived, the words that He spake, have moulded the whole form of moral and religious thought; have influenced the whole tone of social and political life in the civilized world, and do mould them as sensibly as ever. Even they who reject Christianity find that the life which they deny to be Divine has a hold on the imagination and the affections which they cannot explain. They say He is dead, and is still in His grave; that He only lived at all in our faith, or rather in our credulity.

"While we believed, on earth He went,
And open stood His grave;
Men called from chamber, church, and tent,
And Christ was by to save.

"Now He is dead, far hence He lies,
In the lorn Syrian town,
And on His grave, with shining eyes,
The Syrian stars look down."

If so, why cannot they let Him rest there? They are like men who are always raising a ghost, in order to lay it. But He is more than a phantom. There is not one—no, not one among the great of old, "the dead yet sceptred sovereigns who still rule our spirits from their urns"—whose living power over the dominant races of the earth is to be compared with Christ's. And the triumphs wrought by His gospel, with its great thoughts and heart-stirring truths, prove beyond a doubt the living meaning that is in His Name. "Thou shalt call His Name Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."

And, brethren, we have promises which give us assurance that the future shall testify to the glory of His Name. Never did prophets rise to higher strains than when they spoke of the ingathering of the nations to Messiah. Their harp has a fuller note as they foresee a time when all men gathered round the Saviour shall "bow in the Name which is above every name, and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." "Then shall the kings of the earth bring to Him their honour and glory; and

the nations of them that are saved shall walk in His light." The universe shall do Him homage, and many crowns shall be placed on His brow; a shout of welcome shall be heard through the length and breadth of the earth as "He takes the government of the world upon His shoulders," and as dawns the happy day when "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ." "Then all men shall be blessed in Him." The sin and shame and sorrow, the vice and crime, the lust and bloodshed, shall pass away for ever. The perplexities and problems, the doubts and mysteries of life, shall be solved, and the trembling and the weeping shall be over. Then, too, the grave that, like the leech's daughter, has been ever saying, "Give! give! give!" shall hear a voice saying, "Give back! give back! give back!" and shall disgorge its dead. "The tabernacle of God shall be with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them, and be their God." Then "all nations shall call Him blessed." No tongue shall be silent in the great multitude, when, with a loud voice, mighty as the dash of the waves against the shore, or as the sound of the thunder-crash in the sky, they sing the new song: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." "Alleluia!" shall be their cry. "Blessed is He that cometh in the Name of the Lord." "Alleluia; for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

When or in what manner this consummation shall

be attained we cannot say. "It is not for us to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power." These are among the secret things that belong unto God. Let us be content. If we cannot foretell the time when the cry shall be raised, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen!" and every enemy shall be placed under the Saviour's feet, and death and hell cast into the lake of fire, may we not fight as good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and persuade others to "come to the help of the Lord against the mighty"? May we not even amid the struggle and conflict, with their dust on our robes, and their sweat on our face, sing a song of rejoicing, knowing that we are on the winning side, and that the issue shall be victory?

Let us be very confident and very hopeful, and look with the undimmed eye of faith into a future which may not be far off. Let us look steadfastly onward, and beyond the mists and the clouds we shall see the world lying in the sunshine of the Divine presence. Far above the noise and tumult of battle we shall hear the songs of victory; far beyond the wounds, the watching, and warfare we shall see the millennial dawn of perpetual calm and eternal peace. For you and me, and all our brethren in Christ alike, the good news is true that "the Lord reigneth," and shall reign till He accomplish the Father's will in the salvation of "the many sons whom He came to bring unto glory," knitting His elect together in one communion and fellowship in His mystical body, and carrying out the promise

contained in His Name. "His Name shall be called Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins."

As a last thought, let me ask—"What is His Name to you?" Is it "as ointment poured forth"? Is there music in it to our ears? Do we know its power to bless? Are we "washed, justified, and sanctified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God"? Will you take Him as a full Saviour—a Saviour from the power as well as the guilt of your sins? "Wilt thou be made whole?" You cannot be saved *in* your sins. You may wish this, but you cannot. The gate of heaven is wide enough to admit *you*, but not them. "Nothing shall enter there that defileth." Your sins may be to you like the poisoned shirt of Nessus, which could only be torn off the body by tearing the flesh piece by piece with it; but you must be severed from them at all costs. You cannot be His people unless you are "saved from your sins." But if you have any true sense of the evil and curse of sin, you will welcome such a Saviour and such a salvation. In exchange for your sins you will get the power of a new life, and will understand the meaning of "the beauty of holiness." Oh, come to Him, and know the whole meaning of a Name in which all blessing is wrapped up.

So precious has it been to thousands that they have parted from friends and home, father and mother, for its sake—yea, life itself they have counted nothing in comparison with its honour. The quivering lip has uttered it in the flames, and the dying voice has

spoken it from the martyr's pile. You will remember how Mary Tudor of unhappy memory—"Bloody Queen Mary," as she was called—said, when she lay a-dying, that "Calais would be found written on her heart." Calais was considered the brightest jewel in the English crown, and when it was won by the French the queen felt all the anguish of humiliated pride. "On her heart when she was dead, Calais would be engraved." A soldier of the first and great Napoleon was undergoing an operation for a gun-shot wound received on the field of battle. As the surgeon bent over him to probe the wound and extract, if possible, the bullet, a ghastly smile passed over the face of the wounded man, and he said faintly, "A little deeper and you will find the emperor." And on the Christian's heart, more deeply engraven than all other names—so deep that neither life nor death can obliterate the characters—is "the Name of Jesus." It is the last Name that he speaks upon earth, it is the first that he utters in heaven. I urge you above all things to make this Name your trust, and to go forth in its Divine strength to the field of duty or the altar of sacrifice. And, knowing its grace and power for yourselves, strive to make it known to others. Great Name! In it lies the preacher's strength, for it can create life under the ribs of death, illumine the darkest heart, and give hope to the most despairing soul. Let us send it to the nations, for it can civilize the barbarous, raise the degraded, and purify the base. Let us sound it out abroad, for "the Name of the Lord is a strong tower," into which every soul

may run, and be safe from the coming storm. Let us preach it till the whole dark world of sin and suffering feels the presence of the Redeemer; till contrite sinners throw themselves before His cross to do Him homage; till "all men are blessed in Him, and all nations call Him blessed."

To whom shall we go?

"Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered Him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."—JOHN vi. 67, 68.

TAKING for His text the miracle of feeding the five thousand, our Lord had declared Himself to be the true Bread which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. He announced the purpose of His Incarnation, and the absolute necessity of a living trust in His Atonement. "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you." By the eating His flesh and drinking His blood, He means a vital union and communion with Himself: that true faith which makes us "members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones." That His words had no carnal meaning—no mere piercing of His flesh with the teeth, if such a thing were possible—He explains in the sixty-third verse, "It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life."

Many who had followed Him were offended at His sayings. They stumbled at His plain statement of

God's sovereignty in salvation. "No man can come unto Me"—that is, "believe on Me"—"except it be given him of My Father." Closing their eyes against the truth, they fell away from Him, left the company of His disciples, and walked with Him no more. Such defections were as painful to the tender heart of the Saviour as they would be to us. He felt keenly the desertion of many who, up to this time, had pressed upon Him to hear the Word of God, and, perhaps, had lifted up their voices in His praise. Such inconstancy touched Him to the quick, as it would touch us; for He was human as well as Divine.

Very pathetic are the words, spoken, no doubt, from a wounded heart, and in a voice trembling with emotion, "Will ye also go away?" And Peter, with his usual fervour, with tears, perhaps, springing to the eye, and his whole soul thrilling with emotion, replies, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

"Lord, to whom shall we go?" We live in an age of hesitancy and doubt, when men are losing the firmness of their grasp on Christ as the Son of God and Saviour of the world. Authority in matters of belief is rejected. Doctrines which lie at the root of all faith and hope are viewed with distrust, or are cast away as worthless. Truths which our fathers honoured in life, and relied on in death, are treated as outworn superstitions; the Old Testament is regarded as a bundle of myths; the New as "a cunningly devised fable." The sad fact is forced upon us that all faith is out of harmony with the prevailing

opinions of the so-called advanced and liberal thinkers of the day. There is a contemptuous disbelief in anything which the knife cannot dissect, the scalpel reach, or the crucible verify. Nature and Naturalism are worshipped, and God is made helpless under the power of His own laws. Many who are ignorant, even, of the intellectual grounds on which modern unbelief reposes, simply from ignorance or indolence, catch the infection of doubt that is in the air, and, perhaps, for the sake of a name that has some authority, allow their early convictions to evaporate, and permit themselves to be carried along by the force of the current that sweeps hurriedly by. So they make shipwreck of the faith, and, like some rudderless vessel that drags her anchor, drift and strike and go to pieces on the quicksands of unbelief. Let us take heed to ourselves, lest we suffer our grasp on the great principles of the gospel to relax for no better reason than because others who make a pretension of knowledge are going back and walking no more with our Lord. To us all, His pleading love, which knows how prone we are to follow the multitude to do evil, is saying, in view of the prevailing fashion of unbelief, "Will ye also go away?" Let our answer be this, as we cling to His hand with a clasp so firm that we feel to let it go would be death, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

"Lord, to whom shall we go?" To which of the Jewish sects in our Lord's day could the disciples turn for the centre of rest? Should they go to the Pharisees? Religion with this sect had degenerated

into a thing of external forms and ceremonies, a question of broad phylacteries and repetition of formulæ; it consisted in the washing of cups and platters, in the tithing of mint and anise and cummin, in a mere surface show of godliness which left the heart untouched. What life was there for the soul in these things? The spirit has immortal longings which cannot be stayed upon husks. Husks are for swine, and not for men. The hunger of humanity is not to be satisfied with anything short of the living bread from heaven.

Brethren, the gospel is not a ritual. It is not a system of spiritual results attained by material means. It does not bind the free action of Divine grace to certain physical channels. It has its rites, and very simple they are, as instituted by our Lord; but these rites are only handmaids of the Word. It appears to me that at the present day the spirituality of the gospel is at stake; and if the spirituality goes—"if the salt lose its savour, wherewithal shall it be salted?" Is not religion with too many a question of vestments and colours, of certain positions and postures; disputes about ornaments, and the interpretation of a doubtful rubric—matters of external worship; while the great truth is in danger of being forgotten, that "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth"? This externalism, however gorgeous, perfumed with incense and lighted with candles, however æsthetic or ornate, is not religion—has nothing to do with "pure religion and undefiled." Against this the prophets uttered

their indignant protest, and by their mouths God spake in stern reproof: "Your new moons and your fasts and feasts my soul hateth; they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them."

We preachers have still to raise our protest against false types of religion, and false types of orthodoxy; we have to vindicate the spirituality of true godliness from the erroneous teaching that would substitute the form for the power, and to declare, again and again, that "in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." Salvation cometh by faith; "and faith cometh by hearing; and hearing cometh by the Word of God." Turning away from the religion of externals, let us turn to the Christ, and say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Should the disciples go to another sect, the Sadducees? Brethren, if the gospel is not a ritual, neither is it a philosophy. It does not take its place as a rival among the systems of human wisdom. It is a supernatural revelation. What has Sadduceeism to offer? Nothing—nothing save blank materialism. The Sadducees maintained that there was "neither angel nor spirit, nor resurrection from the dead." Man was to be resolved into so much dust and ashes at death, to go down to an everlasting grave, sinking in the black depths of annihilation, like the beasts that perish. Such was life in the light of ancient Sadduceeism; such is it in the light of modern materialism. No wonder that they who

hold such an idea are either oppressed with an intolerable sadness, which makes existence a matter not of rejoicing, but of grief, and the grave a welcome relief from the misery of the present; or that in the recklessness of a fevered and hopeless heart they try to wring from life all it can give of pleasure and indulgence, and cry, in the very delirium of their despair, "Let us eat and drink; for to-morrow we die."

And could this life of the beasts satisfy us? Could it atone for the loss of immortality? No, there is something terrible, horrible—may I not say maddening?—in the thought of a world without a God, of nothing in or above the universe except what we can see or discover by the lamp of philosophy, or the lights of science, and that we are carried along by the blind and irresistible force of things, and are in the hands of a stern, impassive, and inexorable fate! Life were, indeed, not worth living if the heavens above us were empty, and God were not; if redemption were a dream and the gospel a lie, and the illimitable ages a baseless vision; if there were nothing around us but shows and seemings, and we were moving in a world soon to perish "in the wide womb of uncreated night."

Shall we go, then, to the modern Sadducees, or have recourse to the agnostics—men who boast of their ignorance; men who tell us we can know nothing beyond the boundary of sense; who reject revelation; whose lofty tone leaves no doubt upon the mind that they regard themselves as the intellectual leaders in the vanguard of thought; and who speak so

oracularly that you might think wisdom were born in their cradle, and would be buried in their grave? Shall we go to them for instruction, and be taught the destiny of man at their feet?

No! A thousand times, no! And if the Saviour should say to us, "Will ye follow the philosophers of the day, and learn at their mouth? Will ye also go away?"—pressing closer to His side, we will make the instant, fervent reply of Peter: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Let us go to Nature, and see what natural religion can tell us about the relations of man towards God. The works above and around us speak of His wisdom and power, and manifest abundant evidence of a designing mind. "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." But the Creation gives no full and definite information on the attributes and perfections of God, or on the feelings with which He regards the creatures of His hand. "The whole world is out of course," is full of "mourning and lamentation and woe;" the Creation is groaning and in travail; tears and sorrows are all around. The soul sickens and shudders at the burden of pain and death, the anguish and the struggle that sadden and defile the earth. And what is the meaning of it all? Can we learn God's love from the mountains or the stars? Can we read His justice in the forests or the sea? There are stern mysteries on every side for which Nature provides no key; and there are misgivings in the conscience for which

Nature offers no balm. I am a sinner, and Nature nowhere reveals the reconciling blood which washes out transgression. I am unholy, and Nature is silent as to any regenerating power which can sanctify and renew. I am sorrowful, and Nature pauses not in her onward course to soothe or to sympathize; nay, regardless of all my sufferings, she holds on her calm and inexorable way, in unmoved and terrible beauty. Whether I weep or not, the stars look down with shining, pitiless eyes, the flowers bloom, the rivers hurry on to the sea, and the sun makes the day brilliant with his beams, and hurts my wearied eye with his glare. I feel oppressed by the mighty forces of Nature, and I seek elsewhere for a perfect sympathy and an unchanging love. And if some turn away from the mysteries of redeeming tenderness and grace to "teachers that do not profit," for my own part I will turn to One who lives to heal, to help, to save, and to the question of the Redeemer, "Will ye also go away?" my quick and fervent response is this: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life."

Shall we go to Science? Let no one depreciate Science. Rather let us honour her, so far as she is true. She is supplying the world with marvellous facts; unfolding the unspeakable wisdom and beauty that reside in the manifold works of God; and has done much to add to human comfort, to alleviate disease, to prolong life, to lay open the secrets of the universe, and further the progress of mankind. For what she can reveal of positive truth in special sub-

jects we are infinitely thankful. Religion, it has been often said, has no hostility to Science, nor has she anything to fear from her onward progress. I believe that her discoveries can no more discredit the Divine revelation than the swimming of a new planet into our ken can blot out the sun from the heavens, or quench one ray of his brilliant beams. But can Science take the place of Christ? In matters of religion she can say nothing, for she knows nothing and can discover nothing. Men have wrought and toiled, have lived pure and brave and noble lives, and have sung a pæan of praise as they entered the dark valley, who were as ignorant of the movements of the stars, or the strata of the earth, as the babe in its mother's arms; and their happiness and service were in no degree marred by their ignorance. But I am bold to say that, without a knowledge of God in Christ, no man, whatever his scientific knowledge, fulfils the end of his being, or is in harmony with that purpose for which God sent him into the world, that is, to "glorify God here, and to enjoy Him for ever hereafter." Our hearts yearn for communion with God, and Science meets our longings by the doctrine of Evolution, but leaves us in ignorance of the origin of life. Conscience accuses us of sin, and we feel the need of peace; and Science tells us of an established law, of a settled order in Nature, that we must subdue our uneasiness and be content. We recoil from death, and regard it with horror, longing to know what is beyond, and we are told that what has been must be, and are bidden to take comfort from the endless pro-

gression of the race; that though the individual may perish, the race is immortal. Can we satisfy our spiritual hunger with these barren husks? Can they inspire us with faith and trust and love? Can they bring into our souls any Divine ardour, any holy enthusiasm? Can they send us forth to spend and be spent for others, to count not our life dear unto ourselves if we can only advance the kingdom of Christ and the happiness of the world? Scientific truths, with all their splendour, are, for any great and holy purpose, as cold, though they may be as dazzling, as the auroral lights that play in the heart of the northern skies. We turn away from them unsatisfied, and seeing in heaven's own message a revelation to bless us and carry life to dead hearts, we say to the Christ, "Lord, to Thee we will go; 'Thou hast the words of eternal life.'"

"To whom shall we go?" Distracted by many doubts, bleeding from many wounds, weeping over many griefs, we must go somewhere; we cannot rest without finding some anodyne for our woe. Where, then, shall we go? Are we asking this question, or that other like unto it, "Who will show us any good?" Are we saying with the Baptist, disheartened, doubtful, almost in despair, because of his imprisonment, when there seemed to be no help—shall we say, in the message which he sent through his disciples to Christ, "Art Thou He that should come, or do we look for another?"

Then must we turn to the gospel of Christ. He who was its Author and its Object, with an eye that

read the human heart, who knew what was in man, saw his needs, his yearnings, entered into the meaning of all the religious systems that in successive ages have claimed to meet the wants of the human soul—He did not shrink from saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me." His apostles and evangelists, catching from His lips the transcendent import of those words, make them the sum and substance of their message, the very burden of their teaching. "Neither is there salvation in any other," says St. Peter: "for there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but the Name of Jesus Christ." "There is one Mediator between God and man," says St. Paul, "the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all." "If we, or an angel from heaven," cries the same evangelist, "preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached, let them be accursed."

And the apostles speak these words, and others of similar meaning, not simply as controversialists, who are contending for the truth, but as men who have found the secret of happiness, the secret of the highest life, the way and warrant of salvation. Their loftiest ambition, their profoundest desire, is that others may share the privilege and enter into the mystery of their joy. Animated by the truest charity, and speaking the truth in love, they never shrink from proclaiming, with a grand intolerance, a sublime exclusiveness which closes the door against every other hope—that in Christ only is salvation. The religions of the

world—remnants, many of them, of a corrupted tradition—might contain certain elements of truth; indeed, could not otherwise have had any influence, and would have passed at once through their own inherent corruption into dissolution, as erroneous systems always must; but, the error far outbalancing the truth, they could not save from sin nor restore to the image of God. No religion but that of Jesus Christ our Lord can bridge over the chasm which sin has opened between heaven and earth, can touch the human heart in the secret springs of its corruption, raise it from the death of trespasses and sins, or renew it after the image and likeness of God. I do not deny that other agencies, social, philanthropic, and political, may improve mankind, nay, civilize the savage and elevate the debased. But these influences are limited to this narrow stage, and have no effect on the boundless hereafter; they do not and they cannot regenerate or redeem. Their sphere of action is on a lower platform than that of the gospel; they are silent on the gravest questions of human life, dumb as to the deepest problems of our complex nature. Social agencies, political reforms, only touch the outward man; they leave the inner man unreached and unaffected. The great question of all questions is not, as the apostles of "sweetness and light" proclaim, "How can the mind be enriched? how can the manners be improved? how can I take my place in the onward march of society?" but, "What must I do to be saved?" And when you and I have passed off the stage, and others have taken our places; when we

enter on the world of realities, what will be the question which will alone have power to interest? Not whether, during this short life, the intellect was cultivated and the mind improved, but whether the soul is saved unto life eternal, and we are permitted to take up the new song which none can sing but those who are redeemed from the earth.

Here, then, we rest in Christ. In Him are pardon and peace. He has the words of eternal life, and He alone. It is He that brought life and immortality to light by His gospel, and shed illumination over the mysteries of the grave. What lies beyond the valley of the shadow of death? What is on the other side the banks of that still and silent river into which all must go down? If there is no future—if life, with all its changes and sorrows, its baffled purposes and hopes unfulfilled, be ended by a bitter spasm, a terrible struggle, a sharp agony, and there is only a blank beyond—then what a purposeless, hopeless thing this life of ours is; how "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable;" how sorrowful and how sad!

Yet, who shall tell us what death is, or whither it leads? Who can say whether or no those that have fallen asleep in Christ are perished? To whom shall we turn for a reply? The ancient sages are all mute. Their conceptions of the future were more like splendid guesses than certainties, and their conjectures never rose to the ennobling conviction of a sure and certain hope. The eternal future is only clear in Christ; but in Him it is clear. And now we have consolation amidst the darkness of the grave, and a belief which

makes us more than conquerors over the arch-fear. Christ "through death destroyed him that had the power of death;" placed His foot upon the vanquished enemy; and thereby delivering us from all dread of the conquered foe, has put into our mouths the new song: "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?"

It is not only by declaring the resurrection, but by being Himself "the Resurrection and the Life," and by being formed in us the Hope of glory, that Christ gives us the blessed assurance of the life beyond death, and the exceeding glory which He has prepared for them that trust in Him. Can we estimate the blessedness of such knowledge? We are living in a world overshadowed by death; men are dying daily; graves are always being opened; we are borne on irresistibly to the house appointed for all living; to judgment and to God, and the life that never ends. And when the last enemy lays his cold hand upon us; when the sands are fast running out of the hour-glass; when the spirit is about to appear before God, and eternity opens in all its awful proportions, where shall we flee? Where but to Christ? In all the universe there is no other refuge. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee."

Men and brethren, when the waters rise even to the soul, and the gloom of death gathers over it, and the heart and the flesh fail, may God be the Strength of our heart, and our Portion for ever!

God give us a strong and realizing faith! Such a

faith as will transfigure our whole life, hallow the things of time, and give a reality, an intensity, to our work and to our worship, to all that we do for God, or attempt for man! And as the years roll on, and we draw nearer and nearer to that mysterious world whither so many loved ones have already preceded us, may we, under the power of a heaven-born faith, wait and work, trustfully, patiently, hopefully, "till the day break, and the shadows flee away;"

> "Till with the morn those angel-faces smile,
> Which we have loved long since, and lost awhile."

The Bible and Modern Thought.

"And the Scripture cannot be broken."—JOHN x. 35.

THE claims of the Bible on our regard may be considered in two ways.

We may accept the Book as of supreme authority in all matters of doctrine, faith, and practice. We may reverence it as the revelation of the mind of God, and be prepared to receive its statements, even though these statements should clash with the deductions of reason, or the conclusions of preconceived opinion. According to this view, Reason has fulfilled her office and been true to her functions when she has reached the conviction that the Bible is the Word of God. It may have taken us some time to arrive at this conclusion, and we may have had to fight our way to it through much painful thought and study; for in the Holy Scriptures there are, confessedly, many "things hard to be understood," and many things that cannot be understood at all. But when we have come to this conviction, we are bound to accept the Book as a supernatural Book, and to receive its contents as too authoritative to be questioned. Under this con-

viction we surrender our own judgment to that of Revelation ; for if Revelation be the expression of the Divine Mind, it only remains for us to accept what we cannot deny, and to receive what it were a proof of folly to doubt. There may be many things in the Bible that lie outside the province and powers of the mind to discover, many things that are contradictory to its deductions ; but in the one case it is our duty to believe where we are unable to understand, and in the other to cherish that spirit of unshaken faith in the authority of God's Word which nothing can move or overthrow.

But there is another way in which the claims of the Bible may be considered. According to this, we place our own reasoning powers on an equality with the Scriptures, and decline to accept anything which is not level to our capacity of comprehension, or in harmony with foregone conclusions. We must confess that doctrinal statements, and historical facts, are given in the Scriptures in a manner perfectly plain and intelligible as to the Revelation which is made ; although the truths lying underneath the Revelation, and the mode and manner of their operation are, in many cases, surrounded by mystery, and beyond our intellectual grasp. What is our duty in respect to such revelations as these? Surely to inform ourselves whether such a doctrine or fact has been revealed, and if satisfied that it has, to accept it without hesitation. To reject a scriptural statement because it is unintelligible in itself, is to be guilty of the presumptuous thought that either the Infinite is

bound to reveal Himself fully to the finite, or that the capacity of the finite should be so raised and enlarged as to understand the Infinite. If there be nothing in Scripture which is "far above, out of our sight," if there be in it no heights and depths, and lengths and breadths, which it is impossible for us to fathom, to measure, or to compass, then the Bible is but a human Book after all; for there is nothing in it which man could not apprehend, or even conceive, by his own natural powers.

But, it may be asked, ought the communications made, or the facts stated, to be accepted by those who have not the opportunities or the means of testing their truth? May they not, I answer, be received on sufficient evidence?

The discovery some years ago by Lieutenant Greely of an open Polar country—an oasis amid perpetual ice—in which he had travelled a hundred and fifty miles without touching snow, and where vegetation is abundant, was an absolutely new experience, and seems to us impossible. Yet we accept the statement, and other facts quite as strange, on sufficient testimony, even although we have no opportunity ourselves of testing their truth. In many departments of human knowledge "we walk by faith." We believe, though we do not see. Indeed, the state of mind which demands demonstrative proof for everything that is alleged, has been, in all ages, the parent of absolute infidelity. A doctrine is rejected not because it rests on an insufficient amount of testimony, but because it transcends the reasoning

powers. The difficulty of belief lies not in the obscurity of the revelation, but in the nature of the truth revealed. To a humble mind, content to leave the question unanswered, "How can these things be?" it is enough that the Word of God has made the statement, or revealed the truth; whereas to the arrogant, the plainest statements are unconvincing since they assert that which the mental powers are unable to comprehend. It is evident that to a mind so constituted, determined to believe only what can be proved to a mathematical demonstration, no revelation, however plain, or unambiguous, would be of any authority whatever. To such a mind there is logically no possible resting-place between Christianity which believes in Revelation, and atheism which disbelieves God, though, happily, men are inconsistent in their beliefs, for the existence of God cannot be proved in the same way as a problem of mathematics. I maintain, therefore, that the principles of scepticism, if carried out, must lead the sceptic to the denial of every truth which it is beyond the power of reason to discover, and must land him in blank and barren atheism.

There is a school of thought at the present day which, disintegrating the Bible, attacks its authority, and holds and proclaims principles which lead to a doubt and distrust of many of the truths it contains. When it meets with difficulties, it tries to explain them away, or it forces on them strange interpretations; resolves them into allegories, and gives them some meaning which seems to them more worthy of

the Divine Word than the simple truth which lies on the surface. Thus, if the account of the Creation be, in the judgment of modern critics, unreal, or opposed to the conclusions of science, let it be regarded as the Hebrew version of one of the primitive legends, or as a Semitic myth; or let it be turned into a vision. If miracles are recorded, let them be looked on as so many cunningly devised fables, or explained away on some natural hypothesis which requires no Divine intervention, or even be regarded as the dream of an enthusiastic imagination. If the theories of men of science militate against the doctrine of a Divine Creator, then accept these theories, and make an apology for the statements of Holy Writ by speaking of the poetic exuberance, and the metaphorical exaggerations of the sacred writers and of their ignorance of scientific laws. If there be statements in the Bible too dogmatic, too distinctive, too decisive for the acceptance of reason, then we are told that the Bible is not throughout the Word of God, but only contains it; and that the human element is so mingled with the Divine that it becomes a matter of difficulty to determine how much of the Word is of God, and how much is of man. And if we ask, how are we to discover, in order to separate the truth of infallible God from the errors of fallible man, where the line is to be drawn between what is to be received as Divine and what is human, how we are to know when "holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," and when they spake as "moved" by themselves? we are told in answer that we must cast

ourselves upon "the verifying faculty in man." In a word, man is made by this school of theology "a law unto himself;" he may accept all that reason or his own fancy approves; he may reject all that is in antagonism to his own thought, or to his preconceived opinions as to what ought to be.

But is this a safe or satisfying position in which to leave the great question of the criterion of truth? If facts and history, if doctrines and duties, if prophecies and promises, and the whole subject of the sacred text itself, be left to the reason or fancy, the conjecture or criticism of the reader, what can be the result but that all trust in Revelation will be shaken to its centre, and we shall be abandoned to the baseless assumptions of a philosophy falsely so called, and of a wisdom which knows not God?

There can be no question whatever that the present age is characterized by a strong and alarming tendency towards what is known as "free-thought;" the old reverence for authority in things sacred is passing away; the fascinations of critical analysis are carrying men beyond those limits by which truth is guarded, and many delight to air their scholarship by seeking to prove that there are errors in the history and the science, and solecisms in the language and grammar of the Bible.

This condition of mind is baptized by the name of "Modern Thought," and so what is called "the higher criticism," because it deals, not with the interpretation of texts, but with the authenticity of Books—rearranges the whole Bible. It pronounces Genesis to

be a compilation from ancient documents; relegates the earlier books of the Bible to the period of the exile; proclaims the Book of Deuteronomy to be a forgery; asserts that there were two or three or more Isaiahs, some of whom wrote, not before the events of which they speak, but after the events occurred. So that most of the book is history, and not prophecy at all. The higher criticism denies the authenticity and inspiration of the Book of Daniel, and places the Psalms, not in David's time, but in the later stages of the nation's spiritual development. To all of which assertions we return the verdict of "not proven." But, indeed, there is little originality in these criticisms on the Word. They have been paraded in the past by the sceptics who reject the supernatural, and have been made the subject of repeated refutation. The questions as to the authorship of the books of the Bible, of the formation of the Canon, of the various readings which occur in the sacred text, of the degree and nature of their inspiration, these have been before the Church from the very earliest times, and have been reproduced with all the pomp and circumstance of novelties from the days of Porphyry to Strauss, and from the age of Chrysostom to Kuenen.

But have these criticisms, however honest, ingenious, and acute, displaced one fact, one dogma, one duty, set before us in "the lively oracles of God"? Have they interfered with the successes of Christianity? Have they shorn the Word of God of its strength as "the power of God, and the wisdom of

God unto salvation"? I answer, No. No matter however scholarly this destructive criticism may appear; no matter how flattering to intellectual research, or how disturbing to the faith of simple-minded Christians, it does not shake, for one moment, that impregnable Rock on which the Truth stands firm. Of that "Rock" we may say—

> "Like some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
> Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
> Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
> Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

When all these theories have passed to the tomb whither other dead speculations have gone before them; when the memorial of them has perished, and they are buried beneath the dust of ages and forgotten, "the Word of the Lord will abide and endure for ever." All things die but truth. This can never die, or be destroyed; it is as immortal as its Author. Truth, the Truth of God, lives, and will live till time shall be no more; live in that Word which "God has magnified above all His name," and through all eternity it will be seen and known that "the Scripture cannot be broken."

Now, while upholding the inspiration of the Bible, and maintaining its authority as a Book of final appeal, there are some things which I have no hesitation in admitting, and am prepared frankly to concede.

For instance, we must all admit that various readings and certain discrepancies are to be found in the sacred volume. It ought not to excite sur-

prise that a certain number of different readings have been discovered in the manuscripts of the New Testament. It is utterly impossible, in the nature of things, that it should be otherwise. It were little short of a miracle if the copies made from the original manuscripts, and made carefully and conscientiously, did not contain variations. For unless the scribes who copied the manuscripts were infallible, or were preserved miraculously from errors in the transcription, it would be next to an impossibility to prevent certain variations from creeping in. Misapprehension as to the words; inaccuracy on the part of the amanuensis; the presumption of criticism sitting in judgment on an apparently doubtful expression, and the insertion of another, to the critic's thinking more correct; the perishable substance of the material on which the versions were transcribed;—these, and many other causes, could not fail of producing the various readings, of which so much has been made by those who would attach discredit to the text of Revelation.

But this difficulty does not belong to the Word of Inspiration alone. There is many a classic author, both Greek and Latin, whose works labour under the same uncertainty, and the collation and emendation of whose writings, in poetry and prose, impose enormous toil on the conscientious critic. I well remember how Bentley and Porson, who edited some of the Greek plays which I had to read in my school-days, used to deal with difficult passages in the choruses; how, with all the infallibility usual to critics, they put aside the received text as corrupt,

telling us in their notes that Euripides and Sophocles must have written so and so in accordance with their emendation. We are thankful, however, for the assurance of eminent scholars that in the several manuscript copies of the New Testament, though variations exist, many of these variations are not of the slightest importance, and that it remains yet to be proved that any of them are incapable of reasonable explanation. It is no fault of the original Scriptures that the translator has not brought out the full meaning of a word or passage. It does not follow, because two passages appear, at first sight, to be contradictory, that the seeming contradiction may not be reconciled. The labours of learned men have already done much, by the collation of ancient manuscripts, by the restoration of the correct text, and by a revised and more accurate translation, to reconcile statements which a rash criticism affirmed to be antagonistic. It inspires us with confidence to be told, by some of the foremost scholars of the age, that though they have found certain grammatical errors, and several variations, in the different texts, they have not discovered one which in the smallest degree affects any article of faith or practice. And it is even more reassuring to know that the Bible, printed and circulated by thousands, is going forth calm and untroubled, unmoved by the bold criticisms of German critics, or Oxford professors, and proving itself a fountain of life to all who receive its truths ; a well-spring of joy to all who believe in Him of whom its earliest pages speak—to whom its latest

pages testify—Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, the only Redeemer and Saviour of man. It is trying, no doubt, for the Christian scholar to have to follow the critic into the minute details of his criticism, and to spend his strength in breaking flies upon the wheel ; but if the result be that no contradiction has ever been alleged which has not been met by a reasonable solution, his labour has not been in vain.

And, brethren, every day is narrowing the unsteady ground on which the sceptic stands, and widening the stable platform of truth. Classical literature is lending its aid to the Bible, just as the earth, in the Book of Revelation, helps the woman—lending its aid in the use of language ; while greater familiarity with the habits and customs of ancient nations is casting light on scriptural allusions. From the tombs of Nineveh rise up witnesses for God in long-buried marbles ; from the mounds of Babylon are dug up colossal figures that add their testimony to the Scriptures ; on the temples of Egypt, on their monuments, on their divinities carved in stone, may be read inscriptions that are corroborations of Bible story, and that say to us, with a voice from God Himself, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away." The very stones in the wall cry out in witness to Scripture truth. So the Bible, made a target for the scoff of the sceptic and the sneer of the infidel, and betrayed by the kiss of those who pretend to honour while they undermine it, maintains its impregnable position as a book which comes

from God, and age after age adds its unchanging testimony to our Lord's words, "The Scripture cannot be broken."

Again, besides frankly conceding the fact of various readings and apparent discrepancies in the sacred volume, we admit that there are degrees of inspiration. God, who has "spoken at divers times to His people through the prophets," has also "spoken in divers manners." We acknowledge that there is a human element in the Bible as well as a Divine. Some portions of the Bible may have required more especial communications from the Spirit than others. The sacred writer at times narrates things which could only have been communicated from above, such as the narrative of the Creation ; and at times he relates incidents which came under his own observation, such as the events of the forty years' sojourn in the wilderness, in which Moses, the historian, took part. Much of the Bible was written under the direct action and impulse of the Holy Spirit, when the historian or prophet, the psalmist or apostle, was divinely moved to pen the thoughts and the words which were for the instruction of the Church. It may have been that in the production of some parts of Scripture, such as the historical, only the events, the fact, the subject, was suggested, while the words in which these were clothed were left in a great measure to the inspired writer, controlled as he was by the Spirit. In others, as in the case of the Gospels, the narration of the events, their selection, their order, were not simply left to the judgment,

industry, and choice of the writers who record them; but the Holy Spirit, who was promised to guide them into all truth, qualified them for this work, furnished them with the materials, and even so superintended them as to prevent any admixture of error with their statements, thus ensuring that the Scriptures should be "profitable for doctrine, for correction, for reproof, for instruction in righteousness." For whether Moses indited the history of the past, or Isaiah predicted the events of the future, or the apostles wrote of what they had seen and heard, it still needed a Divine supervision to see that all was accurately done, that historian, prophet, or evangelist rightly conveyed the suggested thoughts, or recalled the forgotten incidents; it still needed an ever-watchful wisdom to guide the mind into all truth, as well as an ever-watchful superintendence over the very words of the manuscript. Separate God from the history, or the prophecy, the psalms, or the evangels of the Bible and the Bible is not the Word of God. Admit His presence, His direction, His sanction, and the mode and manner of its inspiration is of little matter. God speaks to us through the Book, speaks to us through human lips—lips stirred by the Spirit, as an Æolian harp is stirred by the wind, and which is mute until the breeze sweeps through the silent chords. Not that the words came through the lips of men mechanically moved, as though they were parts of an automaton; but from the lips of men who felt the tender thought, the solemn warning, the lofty hope, the trembling fear, the glowing inspiration

which they uttered, and who were moved to the very depths of their being by the message they were impelled to deliver. So that the Bible, which is God's Book, is also in a sense man's word. "Holy men," though "moved by the Holy Ghost," spake under the limitations of their age and generation; and their knowledge of philosophy or of science was bounded by the knowledge of their own times; for it was not a part of their mission to instruct us in philosophy, or give us lessons in science. They spake, too, under the conditions of their own human individuality, and their personal idiosyncrasy remained unaffected. And so we have the glowing fervour of Isaiah, the tender pathos of Jeremiah, the spiritual aspirations of David, the loving exhortations of John, and the clear, incisive arguments of Paul. To use the eloquent words of another, "As every pipe of the organ you have been listening to expresses the music that it was fashioned to give—so fashioned that it might give that note and not another, and yet all are filled by one and the same breath—so these souls, fashioned by the conditions of humanity and the circumstances of their lives, were made each to give out its own note, and yet were all filled by the breath of the Divine Spirit, which has made those human, and yet Divine, utterances ring with a melody unquenched and unquenchable through the great aisles of the Church of the living Christ; or as the light, shining through the stained windows of our cathedral, casts on the floor below, in varied light and shade, human shapes and human forms, yet all of them filled with the light that comes from heaven; so

is the Bible which God has given us at once truly human, and yet truly Divine ; the Word of God, veiling itself under, and yet shining through, the word of man." *

But whatever concessions we make as to the various readings in the Bible, as to the different degrees of inspiration, as to the human element which pervades it, there are certain things that we must insist on concerning it. And this first, that the Book throughout is God's Word ; that the Bible, in a sense in which it is true of no other book, is God's Book, and that the utterances of the men whose hearts were filled with the inspiring Spirit, are God's utterances through human lips, and by human pens—God is responsible for all. I fully concur in the words of Locke—words which have passed into a proverb—"The Holy Scripture has God for its Author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter." And I add with him, "therefore I gratefully receive, and rejoice in the light of revelation, which sets me at rest in many things, the meaning whereof my poor reason can by no means make out to me."

Finally, I would ask the advocates of "Modern Thought," the disciples of Kuenen and Wellhausen, to explain the fact that Moses, the son of a Hebrew slave in Egypt, has given us an account of the Creation, not only of simple majesty and unapproaching grandeur, but differing in purity and beauty as

* Magee, "The Bible Human and yet Divine" ("The Gospel and the Age").

much as light differs from darkness, from the cosmogony of all other nations whatever. True, Moses was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," but the Egyptians had no such thrilling and sublime conception of the preparation of the earth by God for the habitation of man. Other cosmogonies bring themselves into immediate and direct conflict with astronomical or geological science, but that there is a broad and general correspondence between the narrative in Genesis and the results of scientific investigation is generally admitted. How is this, if God is not here? if the same Spirit that moved upon the face of the waters did not also move in the heart of the historian, teaching him to describe events beyond man's intelligence to conceive—events over which "the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy"?

If, according to the modern school of criticism, the Tabernacle, which, as we read in the Book of Exodus, was erected at the command of God, and which in outward details was a figure of the temple afterwards to be built, was a creation of the imagination of the times of Ezra, what becomes of the many historical events with which it is connected? If the Book of Deuteronomy was never written by Moses at all, but was a forgery of a writer of the age of Josiah, how could our Lord ground His arguments in His solemn conflict with the tempter on passages contained in this second Book of the Law, or commend to the Jews all the books received by them as books of Moses, stating that they testified of Himself, and saying,

"If ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed Me, for he wrote of Me"? Surely His authority has a weight beyond the doubtful science of language or history, for His knowledge was infallible, and He said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth."

If the Psalms are not to be ascribed to David or his age, but to the later stages of the nation's spiritual development—to the age of Judas Maccabæus—how could our Lord raise the question of His Divinity by referring to the hundred and tenth Psalm?—"How say the scribes that Christ is the Son of David? For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The Lord said to my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool. David therefore himself calleth Him Lord; and whence is He then his Son?" The whole argument rests on this—that Messiah was David's Son, while David calls Him his Lord. St. Paul, speaking by the Holy Ghost, when applying the sixty-ninth Psalm to our Lord, ascribes it to David; and it was the general opinion of the Jewish scribes and rabbis that these sacred songs were written by him, or composed by other holy men in his time and in an early age. And can it be supposed that learned men among the Jews, to whom the Law was a daily study, and who regarded their sacred books with the utmost reverence, should believe that psalms, in reality not many centuries old, had been composed and were in use some thousand years before? Had they no literary

perception? How could these writings, when first published, be palmed off on the people as composed by David, if they belonged to a later age? Surely the whole theory, deserving, if it were true, the indignant reprobation of all honest men (for it is based on a fraudulent pretence), and dishonouring to the character of our Lord, who gave it His sanction, is utterly baseless, not to say impossible and absurd.

So, had we time, we might vindicate the unity and integrity of Isaiah, and show that the Bible is not a piece of patchwork, as modern criticism would make it, transferring as it does the last twenty-seven chapters to a "great unknown," who lived at Babylon at the end of the exile. Ewald admits that eleven of these chapters cannot be reconciled with this supposition. As the Dean of Canterbury says, in his Bampton Lectures on "Prophecy a Preparation for Christ," "the theory of a Babylonian Isaiah is dead." "Dead," I repeat; and I would ask the modern critic who seeks to revive it, how a book, written after the exile and the return, and the command to Cyrus to assist in rebuilding the Holy City, could be received by the Jewish people as written some five hundred years before, and how they could accept it as the work of Isaiah himself? And how could He, "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge," appeal to such a book as bearing witness to Himself? How could His apostles, full of the Holy Ghost, speak of the fulfilment of its prophecies in His sufferings and death, and treat the book in all respects as trustworthy and inspired? Let them give the answer

if they can, without casting discredit on the infallibility of Him who has placed the stamp of His Divine authority on the Old Testament Scriptures.

And, once more, let the modern critic explain how, if the Book of Daniel, as he asserts, was written after the time of Antiochus Epiphanes, only some two centuries or less before Christ, it could have been received at the Christian era by the Jews as the prophecy of Daniel in Babylon, written about five centuries and a half before. The Jews knew they were the depositaries of the Scriptures of God, that "to them were committed the lively oracles," and they would have rejected at once a book which they must have known to be spurious, and which, so far from being written by a prophet in the Captivity, was of comparatively modern date. I pass by the fact that the book was translated into Greek by the LXX., "and a considerable interval," says Archdeacon Rose, "must have elapsed between the original of Daniel and its translation." I pass by this evidence to ask, if the book be neither authentic, nor genuine, nor inspired, would our Lord, as He sat on the Mount of Olives, with the Holy City lying below, quote from its pages a prophecy that should ere long be fulfilled in the destruction of the Holy City, warning His disciples to "flee to the mountains when they saw the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy places"? Surely such words at such a time set the seal of an infallible sanction on the book, and authorize us to believe that it was written by Daniel, and at the date gene-

rally received. What answer can be given by the higher criticism to the questions I have proposed, except one which would exalt the knowledge of this school on the sacred literature of the Jews above the knowledge of Him "to whom was given the Spirit without measure"? We shrink from such a thought as this, implying, as it does, that either the Christ of God shared the popular ignorance of His time, and was mistaken as to the authority of the Scriptures, or that He appealed to the historic truth of events and persons in which He Himself did not believe. Either supposition lowering, as it would, His character of a Teacher of truth, is not only dishonouring to the Only Begotten of the Father, but destructive of any confidence in His words; for if we cannot trust His authority as regards historical truth, how can we trust it as regards spiritual? In His own words to Nicodemus, "If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you of heavenly things?" Of course, I know what has been said about the "kenosis," when our Lord "made Himself of no reputation." But the "emptying of Himself" consisted, as the context says, in veiling His Divine splendour, and in taking upon Him "the form of a servant." He did not empty Himself of His Godhead, or of His attributes or perfections, but the human nature was so taken into the Divine as to be enriched by its wisdom and knowledge. This secured to Him a necessary infallibility, the only security of our faith, yet without a conversion or confusion of the natures.

But a word more. If the Bible be the very Word of God, we surely see the solemn duty and high privilege of studying its pages, of making it the rule of our lives, and of giving it the honour that is its due. It is the only Book that can minister support in hours of sorrow, weakness, and trial. It is the only Book that can guide us safely through the waves of temptation and sin; that can impart courage in adversity, patience in trouble, and shed a light on the future when we have to "take the death-angel by the hand, and bid farewell to wife and babes and home," and pass into the valley of the shadow of death. Let us give this Book a place in our lives beyond all other books; otherwise it cannot be a Book of Life to us. It may be venerable from its antiquity, interesting from its history, attractive from its poetry, useful from the moral lessons it inculcates, but as to conveying any blessing to the soul, no better than the veriest fable. Let its words sink deep into our hearts, and then, and then only, we shall know that the Book has for us the words of eternal life; and we shall understand in a very true and real and blessed sense that "it is easier for heaven to pass than one tittle of the Law to fail."

Sacerdotalism.

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"—1 Cor. iii. 5.

The apostles never magnify themselves, and even while they magnify their office, they speak of themselves as servants of the flock, ministers under God through whom others were to be brought to the faith of Christ. They were simply stewards or ambassadors of God, and they were never once addressed or spoke of themselves as priests. The only priests under the gospel dispensation are the saints, the members of the Christian family. Writing to these, St. Peter says, "Ye are a royal priesthood." The kingdom of Christ has no sacerdotal system. To quote Bishop Lightfoot, in his article on "The Christian Ministry," "It interposes no sacrificial tribe or class between God and man, by whose intercession alone God is reconciled, and man forgiven. Each individual member holds personal communion with the Divine Head. To Him immediately he is responsible, and from Him directly he obtains pardon, and draws strength."

It is true that sacerdotalism appeals to a principle in the human heart. It is common to all religious

creeds, and has been known in all ages of the world. It arises from a consciousness more or less distinct of sin. Men feel that they have offended God; they know that they are in the power of a Being greater and holier than they are; they long to approach Him, and yet are afraid to do so. They are attracted and repelled. They therefore seek the intervention of another who is more likely to be acceptable to God than themselves, to represent them before the Deity; and who for them shall offer sacrifices, prayers, and thanksgiving. He becomes their representative in "things pertaining to God." He stands between man and his Maker, and thus acquires that spiritual despotism which in heathen times held the mind and body in bondage, and which in modern days crushes and dominates the soul. The very idea of sacerdotalism is based on the notion that the priest is superior to other men, either from his descent, or knowledge, or holiness, and that the Deity can only be approached through his mediation. He alone has the key to the mysteries of religion; and that key he keeps in his own hand. No one but the priest can perform the ritual, or conduct the ceremonies of religion; he ministers at the altar; he sheds the blood of the sacrifice; he presents prayer; nothing can be done in the soul's high concerns with God except through his intercession. We see what power this gave to the priest. If he alone could consult the oracle and give the answer, if he alone could slay the victim and propitiate the Divine favour, if he alone could receive confession and pronounce for-

giveness, no wonder that men were willing to place themselves at his feet, and submit to the authority which he claimed. Hence arose, on the one side, the most arrogant pretensions; and on the other the deepest spiritual terror. The trembling soul was at the mercy of the man who alone could free it from an agonizing sense of sin, or dread of the vengeance of an angry God; for the priest claimed for himself an authority over the conscience; intruded himself into the most sacred acts of the soul, searched into all the secrets of the heart, interfered in the most intimate relationships of life, and did not loose his terrible grasp of the struggling spirit till death released the victim from his power.

The Jewish priesthood was unlike all other priesthoods: it stood alone. It was not based on the superiority of one man over another; it was not grounded on caste or descent; it was directly instituted by God Himself, and that with a defined purpose. It was to provide the nation conscious of sin, yet desiring communion with Heaven, with a representative who should have special access to His presence. It was also intended to be typical of the great High Priest who was to mediate between man and God,—Himself both God and man, and able to lay His hand upon both, to bring them into reconciliation. If there was conscious guilt on the part of the Jew—if there was deserved penalty, if there was need of intercession, or yearnings after counsel and consolation—he must put his case into the hands of the priest, through whom alone his sacrifice could be offered, his

gifts received, and his thank-offerings presented. But there was nothing permanent in this: it was but "a shadow of good things to come." Judaism was but a typical system, and was all arranged after a pattern shown to Moses on the mount. When "the fulness of the time" came for the accomplishment of the eternal purpose of God in Christ Jesus, and when the true High Priest appeared to "put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself," then the type was no longer needed, and Judaism was abolished. When that which was perfect was come, that which was in part was done away. The temporary, earthly priesthood was at an end, and the permanent, heavenly Priesthood took its place. There was no longer any privileged class of men who were to mediate between man and God. Every man might carry his own sins and sorrows to the throne of grace, and present his praises and thank-offerings there. For "we have a great High Priest, who has passed into the heavens," —"a Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which God has pitched, and not man." In Him we have all that we require: access to the Father; the gift of the Spirit; pardon for sin; peace of conscience; "whatever pertains to life and godliness;" all that is needful for growth in grace here, or for the possession of glory hereafter. Therefore the need of an earthly priesthood ceases.

The name "priest" is never applied in the New Testament to the ministers of the gospel dispensation. The presbyter or elder is never called "*sacerdos*," or "priest." This is only to be accounted for on the

hypothesis that the ministers of the new faith had no priestly functions to exercise, and no altar at which to sacrifice. There was nothing in the office of the apostles or the bishops, the presbyters or deacons, to suggest any sacerdotal functions, or to justify the conception of a human priesthood. They were "stewards of the mysteries of God;" but these mysteries were not secrets to be carefully concealed, but truths which they were to make known, and which they dared not keep back without being untrue to the trust committed to their charge. Indeed, the conception of a human official priesthood is opposed to the entire genius and spirit of Christianity. It is not Christian but anti-Christian, and, as in the case of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who sought priestly dignity for themselves, profanely intrudes into the office of the one and only Mediator between God and man. All true believers are priests, consecrated by an unction from the Holy One, and appointed to offer up "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Nor does this at all interfere with the institution of a Christian ministry—with our order of men who shall preach the Word, dispense the Sacraments, minister in the congregation, build up the saints in their most holy faith, and seek out the sheep of Christ who are scattered abroad in this naughty world. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." There is no room for a human official priesthood in the New Testament dispensation. To use the words of Neander, in his "Church History," "There could be no longer a priestly or prophetic office constituted to serve as a medium for the propagation and development of the kingdom of God, on which office the religious consciousness of the community was to be dependent. Such a guild of priests as existed in the previous systems of religion—empowered to guide other men who remained as it were in a state of pupilage, having the exclusive care of providing for their religious wants, and serving as mediators by whom all other men must first be placed in connection with God and Divine things—such a priestly caste could find no place within Christianity." *

It may be well asked how the idea of priesthood found its way into the gospel dispensation. It was of gradual growth. There is something in priesthood which is congenial to human nature. Man, as I have said, has a consciousness of sin, which brings with it a dread of God; he has a vivid sense of personal responsibility, which seeks relief in the transference of it to another. These feelings lead him to obtain the help of a fellow-man, who from his ministerial position, with its prerogatives and privileges, shall mediate between him and God—shall for him

* Neander's "Church History," vol. i. (Clark's Library.)

propitiate the Divine favour and avert the Divine wrath. The men themselves—who are regarded with an exceptional sanctity because they minister in holy things—partaking of the frailties of humanity, and not loth to be considered the possessors of an authority which brings the laity to their feet, receive the deference which is offered, and become "lords over the heritage of God." Thus there grew into prominence a corruption of Christianity which surpassed both Judaism and paganism in the supernatural powers attributed to the priests, and the superstitious homage which was conceded to their claims.

Rome built up a great system of false religion, the main elements of which were partly Jewish and partly pagan. The Church was given the place of Christ: the priest was installed into the place of God. The priests were to utter the Church's infallible decrees; they were to govern, to forgive, and to save, and the religious life of the laity was dependent on the acts which they performed in their stead and in their behalf. Without the sacerdotal functions and acts of the human priest, the death and intercession of Christ were of no avail. The throne of grace was established, but it could not be approached save through the intermediate agency of the man appointed to mediate with God. He alone, because of his sacerdotal powers, had authority to administer the sacraments, to bestow absolution, and to give the dying soul a passport into the kingdom of heaven. This is the doctrine of the Romish Church. She holds that the priest has power to forgive; that he acts

as a judge in the stead of God. The priest forgives, and God ratifies his forgiveness. They who adopt this theory of priestly judicial absolution, of course must take with it all its necessary and logical consequences of auricular confession, penance, and indulgence. It was this doctrine—the very pillar and ground of the Roman system—that was assailed by our reformers, and from which, at the cost of their lives, they purified the Church. They maintained that all human priesthoods were summed up in Christ; that they passed away when He came, and, offering Himself a sacrifice for sin, entered with His own blood into the holy place not made with hands. Then there was for all "boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus;" then all might "draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith." There was no need of a priest on earth, because there was one priest in heaven. And so, to use again the words of Neander, "what Moses expressed as a wish—that the Spirit of God might rest upon all, and all might be prophets—is a prediction of that which was to be realized through Christ. By Him was instituted a fellowship of Divine life, which, proceeding from the *equal* and *equally immediate* relation of all to the one God as the Divine Source of life to all, removed those boundaries within which, at the Old Testament position, the development of the higher life was still confined; and hence the fellowship then derived, essentially distinguishes itself from the constitution of all previously existing religious societies."

"In removing out of the way that which separated men *from God*, in communicating to all the same fellowship *with God*, Christ also removed the barrier which had hitherto divided men from one another."* All Christians are in a true sense priests, because they offer up spiritual sacrifices ; but ministers of the gospel, as distinguished from the laity, are called "stewards of the mysteries of God," "ambassadors for Christ," "ministers of Christ," "ministers of the New Testament," "ministers of God," but are never once named priests. Their office is more like that of the ancient prophet in Israel than that of the sacrificing priest. It is their duty to "warn every man and teach every man in all wisdom ;" to rebuke and to exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine ; but they are not priests any more than other believers in the Lord. "Ye are a royal priesthood," are the words of St. Peter to Christians. To the minister is committed the duty of conducting the public services of the Church, of offering prayer, preaching the Word, and administering the two sacraments which Christ has ordained. But there is nothing sacerdotal in these functions—nothing of a pure priestly or mediatorial power. The man set apart to minister in the congregation exercises no priestly authority ; he repeats no sacrifice ; he does not bestow forgiveness in the place of Christ ; he is not the judge who absolves—he is only the messenger who pronounces the absolution.

There never was a time when this truth needed to be more enforced than the present. There has been

* Neander's "Church History," vol. i. (Clark's Library.)

an attempt made for many years past to revive the idea of sacerdotalism in our Church, and to re-introduce the worst errors and most glaring superstitions of Rome. The leaders of this school cling as heartily as do the most earnest votaries of the Roman Church to the essence of Popery, which is priesthood, and to the mystic virtue of ritual acts which a priesthood alone can perform. The Church has been exalted into the place of Christ, and her ministers have been clothed with awful and supernatural powers. It is asserted that to clergymen episcopally ordained, and deriving their orders in long and unbroken succession from the apostles, belong "the power of the keys;" "the power of the keys" being interpreted as a real power to forgive or refuse forgiveness spiritually to the souls of sinners; so that he whom the minister absolves becomes thereby cleared from sin in the sight of God, and he to whom he refuses absolution remains unforgiven by God.

Hence the confessional-box is again set up in our churches, and private auricular confession enjoined; a distinction is made between sins mortal and venial, and the need of penance and absolution before post-baptismal sin can be forgiven is enjoined. With the intrusion of priesthood into the Christian Church comes the mysterious gift which makes baptism wash away sin and renew the soul, and also the awful claim of repeating the sacrifice of Christ upon the altar; of turning the bread and wine into the body that was broken, and the blood that was shed upon the cross, and making an offering of both unto God

for transgression. In proof of this, I need only appeal to the language used in "Tracts for the Day." Here we read, "In order to this union of the flesh of Christ with ours, He first incarnates Himself in the hands of the priest; that is, at the moment of consecration Christ unites Himself, body, soul, and divinity, in an ineffable manner with the elements of bread and wine." By "the real presence of Christ" is not meant a presence by Divine power or spiritual grace, but the presence of His very true body—that very body which He took of the substance of the Virgin Mary, His mother, which was crucified, dead, and buried, and ascended far above all heavens. "It is a miracle as great as any recorded in Scripture." "Whole Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity," is thus present (at the moment of consecration). No wonder that the question which follows is this: "Shall we not worship Him with adoring faith and the deepest prostration of our spirits?" "The adoration of Christ in the Sacrament is not a thing merely to be tolerated; it takes the rank of a Christian duty." Now, this is not Christianity; it is idolatry pure and simple, opposed to the whole genius of the gospel, and to the teaching of our Church. It is a system which exalts the priest, and places men's souls and salvation in his hands. It brings the laity in humble prostration to the feet of one clothed with the mysterious power of bringing Christ down upon the altar at his word. One of the wisest, most learned, and deepest thinkers that ever adorned the Church of England uses language concerning such blasphemous assumption on the part of

the sacerdotalists which is not a whit too strong in its condemnation. In a letter written to Mr. Justice Coleridge in 1841, Dr. Arnold has the following words: "The priest is either Christ or anti-Christ; he is either our mediator, or he is like the man of sin in God's temple. 'The Church system' is either our gospel, and St. John's and St. Paul's Gospel is superseded by it, or it is a system of blasphemous falsehood, such as St. Paul foretold was to come, such as St. John knew to be already in the world." * Again he writes in another letter: "The kingdom of God is the perfect development of the Church of God; and when priestcraft destroyed the Church, the kingdom of God became an impossibility." † The kingdom of God must be "an impossibility" wherever the priestcraft heresy is received, where the Church takes the place of the Saviour, and the priest takes the place of God. Priestcraft, which is paganism—priestcraft, which is Popery, is the religion of man's corrupt heart, and, like all that proceeds from that evil source, is "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

And is it to this we are coming in this nineteenth century, with all its boasted enlightenment and advancing civilization? Are we about to return to the superstitions of the Middle Ages, to be bewitched and beguiled by the unholy sorceries of the Church of Rome? Are we going to drink again of the wine of her fornication? Are the clergy to be exalted into demi-gods? Are the laity willing to give up their

* "Life and Correspondence of Dr. Arnold," vol. ii. p. 265.

† Ibid., p. 435.

consciences into their hands? Is the light of the glorious gospel to be hidden away under the bushel of tradition? Shall we exchange the spirit of truth for will-worship, and the genuine humility of a broken and a contrite heart for a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels and of saints, and lowly obedience to a man-made priest? No; ours shall not be a retrograde movement, but an advance. We will not travel the backward path which leadeth to the darkness of Rome, but tread the onward road which "shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

We do not wish for "the dim religious light" of Mediævalism; we prefer the unclouded sunshine of our Father's countenance as made known to us in the face of Jesus Christ. Never will we turn the house of God into a place of meretricious entertainment, nor the ministers of Christ into sacrificing priests, nor the Supper of the Lord into a parody of the crucifixion. We will leave the golden censer, the fumes of incense, the gaudy, childish vestments, and the elaborate music, with lights and flowers, banners, decorations, and pictures, to the theatre, where they may be regarded as congenial accessories to the performance. We will refuse to have Christianity dramatized, and Christ "crucified afresh." We protest against this carnal, materialistic, superstitious system which would reduce us again under the weak and beggarly elements of the world, and would substitute sense for faith. The glory of the Christian religion lies in its spirituality. When contrasting the services of the Jewish temple, with all its pomp and

magnificence—symbols and types fitted for a period of childhood—with the religion which He was about to institute, and adapted to those of mature age, our Lord tells us that from all this imposing but cumbrous symbolism we are for ever freed; for He says in words which imply the true conception of Christian worship, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth."

It has been well said of Roman Catholicism—which is developed priestcraft, and which is indeed the masterpiece of Satan, and a pagan corruption of Christianity—that it was constituted for the two great divisions of mankind: "the one which would be saved by their merits, and the one which would be saved in their sins. Find a religion that will accommodate itself to man as he is, without any serious effort to make him what he is not; find a religion which is rich in prescriptions for doing and suffering and paying, to be readily and greedily swallowed by the sufferer, and which is content with the penance done, and gives a licence and liberty to the renewed and revived passions; find a religion that will do both these things, and you will find the darling parallel of human nature, which possesses every element of congeniality and consequent popularity with man as man. Romanism is that religion. Romanism is the charmer. She oscillates with conscience, with a black tent in one hand, and a bright carnival in the other." Therefore the whole system of Romanism, or sacerdotalism—it matters little by what name you call it—is of the earth, earthy. It is essentially carnal, and hence its

success with those whose object is to have a religion, or something that passes for a religion, which allows indulgence to their passions, and does not disturb them in their sins.

All should oppose, so far as in them lies, the spread of sacerdotal error. The duty is binding on all Christians. It is a duty specially binding on those who have influence or authority in a Church which cast it out of her Book of Common Prayer, and, after centuries of corruption, restored the pure Christian ideal. We know the object of sacerdotalism. It seeks to restore the idol of superstition to its pedestal. It would suspend the rent veil afresh between man and the mercy-seat. It would close the new and living way that has been opened to God, and forbid direct access to our Father in heaven. It would intrude an earthly mediator between us and that great High Priest, who, with love in His heart, and tenderness in His eyes, and urgency in His voice, stands with outstretched arms, and cries aloud to all, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

And, finally, no tongue can describe the wrong done to religion by the introduction of this subtle sacerdotal leaven into the Church. It was sacerdotalism that turned the Gospel of the Grace of God from a simple message of reconciliation into a material mechanical Ritual. It was sacerdotalism that changed the Sacrament of Baptism, wherein the infant is dedicated at the font to God, into a magic charm for the necessary infusion of Divine grace, so accomplish-

ing, *ex opere operato*, the greatest spiritual change we know of. It was sacerdotalism that distorted the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper—the Sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death—into the unbloody sacrifice of the mass, bringing down Christ into a local residence in bread and wine. It was sacerdotalism that invented the torture-chamber of the confessional, and so established an arrogant dominion over the consciences of men. And it is sacerdotalism which, in a more veiled, but all the more dangerous form, is now at work in our Church, labouring to attach a sanctity to external symbols and forms; to substitute the ceremonial for the spiritual; to elevate the clergy above the laity; to give the Church the place which is only due to Christ. And if this be so, shall we not lift up our voice in indignant protest against a system which dishonours the Saviour, perverts the simplicity of the gospel, and would bring us again under a yoke of bondage which our fathers were not able to bear? Yes, truly. And if we are asked to receive such a false, carnal, unscriptural system as this, we shall refuse to do so—refuse with all the righteous indignation of a just disdain; and to those who would bring us into subjection to sacerdotalism we shall give place, no, not for an hour, but, valiant for the truth, "contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints."

God's Sovereignty and Man's Responsibility.

"Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity."—2 TIM. ii. 19.

I HAVE offered the prayer usual at the beginning of a sermon, and have chosen the one for All Saints' Day. In this Collect we address Almighty God who has "knit together His elect in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of His Son Christ our Lord." This is not the only Collect in which our Church speaks of "the elect." In our Burial Service we pray that Almighty "God, of His gracious goodness, would shortly accomplish the number of His elect, and hasten His kingdom." I shall therefore speak this morning on the doctrine of election. Is the doctrine to be found in Scripture? What is its meaning? What are its bearings? How does it touch God? How does it influence man? The word "election" constantly meets us in the Bible, and we find it not only in the occasional Services which have been mentioned, but also in the Baptismal Service and the seventeenth Article. This Article sets forth the doctrine with all plainness and distinctness. The Catechism which we put into the hands of our children directly alludes to it, and affirms that one of the lessons which

we learn from the Creed is this: "I believe in God the Holy Ghost, who sanctifieth me, and all the elect people of God."

It is well, therefore, to have some definite ideas on the doctrine, and learn what is said about it in the Bible. It is not a merely speculative doctrine, nor one of those which only tend to questions and strifes of words; for if it be revealed in the Word, it must be profitable. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," says the Highest authority, "and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." *This* Scripture must, therefore, be "profitable." That it is so is evident from the fact that many a one has been awakened to a deep concern about eternity by the salutary terror which this doctrine has aroused in his mind.

Very few words will explain the position of the text in the chapter before us. The apostle has been alluding to two men who had not only "made shipwreck of faith themselves," but who were leading others into error; and, lest this apostasy of Hymenæus and Philetus should dishearten Timothy, he adds the assurance that though some fall away from the truth, yet are there those who are "kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." "Nevertheless," he says, "the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." And then, to remind him that this knowledge of God does not interfere with the responsibility of man, he adds, "Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Let me say at the outset that the frame of mind with which we are to approach this subject is to be one of reverence and humility. We are to approach it with the admission that in whatsoever manner God reveals Himself in His Word, in that manner are we to believe on His Name, whether He does so as a loving Father, "who will have all men to be saved," or as an absolute Sovereign who "will have mercy on whom He will have mercy, and compassion on whom He will have compassion." Both these statements are to be received in their integrity; and instead of attempting to solve the problem which they present, by denying or evading either assertion, we are to bow before the acknowledged mystery, leaving the solution of these difficulties to that Great Day when we shall "know even as we are known."

You will admit that in the purpose of God there can be "no variableness, neither shadow of turning;" that where Omniscience and Omnipotence are combined, there can be "neither chance nor resistance from without, nor any imperfection at all in the determination of things within Himself, which can give God cause to add or abate," or alter anything in His purpose and will. Moreover, all that is to take place in the eternity to come, is nothing more than the fulfilment of that which was resolved on by the Divine mind in the eternity past. And if this be granted, then nothing can arise which God did not foresee and did not determine; for if the smallest movement were unprovided for, it might evoke a train of circumstances which would disturb the whole framework of

His designs. The greatest events are often dependent on the smallest causes, and therefore it has been well said, "if anything can be contingent, nothing can be certain." And just as truly may it be said, that if anything be certain, nothing can be contingent. This is plainly stated by the Prophet Isaiah in the following words: "He is God, and there is none like Him, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure." "The model of the whole world," says an old writer, "and of all the course of time, was with Him one and the same from all eternity, and whatever is brought to pass is exactly answerable to that pattern," for with Him there is no change nor shadow of turning. There is nothing dark to "the Father of lights;" He sees at one view through all things and all ages, from the beginning of time to the end of it, "yea, from eternity to eternity." * Now, although this opinion, considered in itself, does not appear open to objection, yet when we come to apply it to men, and bring it to bear on their different characters and their future destinies, it does to some appear so arbitrary on the part of God, so partial to the elect, so unjust to those not elected, and so fatal to morality, that volumes of angry controversy have been written on the subject, and endeavours have been made to evade and explain away those passages of Holy Writ in which it is found. The question, however, is not this, whether we can harmonize with previous conceptions the

* Archbishop Leighton, 1 Pet. i. 20.

doctrine of election according to grace, but whether God has distinctly declared in His own Word the fact that there is such an election out of mankind—an election set apart as the predestinated heirs of glory. If this be a truth distinctly revealed in the Bible, then it must be received as the good will of God; and reason has only to accept the disclosures of Revelation, confessing that though she cannot understand, she is nevertheless constrained to believe. And of this we may be quite sure, that God's election of His people proceeds on fixed principles, and that these principles are in entire harmony with His character and attributes. Whatever may be the principles on which His choice proceeds (and they are unknown to us), they must be in entire accordance with His combined perfections of justice, wisdom, and love. Though He is a Sovereign, and acts as a Sovereign, His sovereignty is not that of a human despot, but of an infinitely holy, gracious, and beneficent Being. And let us remember, too, that the Divine election is always connected with life, never with death. "My sheep shall never perish;" "I give unto them eternal life." It is connected with love. "I have loved thee with an everlasting love, therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee." Again, this decree of election bars the access of none who come to God through Christ Jesus. It is, indeed, the cause of our seeking God, but it hinders none who seek Him from finding. It has nothing to discourage any sinner; for since we are not elected because we are holy, which none are, but elected in

order that "we may be holy, and without blame before Him in love," then there is hope for the chief of sinners. If all who are elect, are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," why should any despair? Nay, in this truth that we are chosen not because we are holy, but in order that we may become holy, hope sends a beam of light down into the depths of the very guiltiest heart.

Nor is this election confined to a small number out of mankind. Those who oppose this doctrine of the Word of God, delight in misrepresenting those who hold it, and say they condemn the majority of mankind to destruction, and only admit a few into the kingdom of heaven. This is simply a libel; I for myself believe that the saved will far exceed the lost, and that when the elect of all dispensations shall be gathered in, "a great multitude which no man can number," "a great cloud of witnesses," "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands," shall fill the "many mansions" of our Father's house in heaven. How else should Christ see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied?

Nor has this doctrine a harsh or unforbidding aspect to those who regard it rightly, and who submit themselves to the righteousness of God. As our seventeenth Article says, "It is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort to godly persons, and such as feel in themselves the working of the Spirit of Christ, mortifying the works of the flesh, and the

earthly members, and drawing up their mind to high and heavenly things, as well because it doth greatly establish and confirm their faith of eternal salvation, to be enjoyed through Christ, as because it doth fervently kindle their love towards God."

Let me give you some scriptural proofs of this doctrine.

Our Saviour speaks on this point. In John vi. 37, we read, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." And again, in John x. 27, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, which gave them Me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and my Father are one." In His Divine intercessory prayer to His Father, in the seventeenth of St. John, He uses these words: "Glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee. As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh that He should give eternal life"—to whom?—"to as many as Thou hast given Him." When the Apostle Paul preached to the Gentiles at Antioch the gospel of the grace of God, it is recorded that "as soon as the Gentiles heard this they were glad, and glorified the Word of

the Lord;" and then follows this remarkable expression: "And as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed." To the Christians at Ephesus St. Paul writes in the following language: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will." To the Christians at Thessalonica the apostle addresses similar language: "We are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." It were easy to give many another proof of this mysterious doctrine; but those adduced are enough for my purpose, and the only fair and honest conclusion to be drawn from the passages quoted is surely this: that there is such a thing as "a chosen generation"—a Church within a Church—a Church which has been "chosen of God before the foundation of the world," and which alone is in possession of spiritual life; while all the rest of the baptized have either "the form of godliness without its power," or they are dead in sin without any profession whatever. If it were not for this election of grace, all men would die in their sins. I need not tell you that, owing to the sinfulness of our nature, we all "love darkness rather than light, because our

deeds are evil;" that naturally "our heart is set in us to do evil;" that "the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." And did not the effectual grace of God, working through the power of the Holy Ghost, turn the sinner from "darkness unto light," and so make him "a new creature," he must continue an "alien from the commonwealth of Israel, a stranger from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." If it were not for this effectual energy and power of the Holy Ghost in winning the heart of the sinner, and subduing the evil of his nature, there would be no salvation for any man, even after all that Christ has done, despite His agony and bloody sweat, His cross and passion, His precious death and burial. But the work of the Spirit in separating the elect from the mass of mankind, is the execution in time of the eternal decrees of God's election; it is the quickening into spiritual life of those "many sons" whom God has before determined to "bring unto glory." And this knowledge that He should "see" in some "of the fruit of the travail of His soul," was the thought with which the Lord consoled Himself in the midst of an almost universal scorn, indifference, and unbelief. When "He came to His own, and His own received Him not;" when the Pharisees scorned Him, and the scribes rejected Him, and the people derided Him; when His heart was wounded to the core because sinners would not be won to His arms; the truth which sustained Him amidst an open and general rejection of His offers

was this: "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me; and him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight." His labour was not to be in vain. "The pleasure of the Lord should prosper in His hand."

It was the same truth which for his consolation St. Paul placed before Timothy at a time when apostasy abounded, and heresy was eating out the life of the Church. When evil men, such as Hymenæus and Philetus, not only erred from the faith themselves, but sought to overthrow the faith of others, the apostle planted his foot on this rock, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His."

Let us look at the bearing which this doctrine ought to have on our practical godliness, in connection with the latter clause of the text: "Let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity."

Men are responsible beings; they are addressed in the Bible as having the liberty to choose for themselves between life and death.

Predestination is not the fatalism of Mahomet, which does not recognize means as an intermediate step between the primary counsel and the ultimate consummation, but it recognizes and proceeds upon means, thus reconciling the responsibility of man with the predestination of God. How these apparently conflicting truths can be reconciled the Bible

tells us not; but as it reveals both, we receive both, preaching both the election of God and the free agency of man. Very forcible are the words of Bishop Horsley on the subject. He says, "The liberty of man and the foreknowledge and providence of God are equally certain, although the proof of each rests on different principles. Our feelings prove to every one of us that we are free; reason and revelation teach us that the Deity knows and governs all things, that even 'the thoughts of man He understandeth long before' the thoughts arise, long before the man himself is born who is to think them. Now, when two distinct propositions are separately proved, each by its proper evidence, it is not a reason for denying either that the human mind upon the first hasty view imagines a repugnance, and may perhaps find a difficulty in connecting them even after the distinct proof of each is clearly perceived and understood. There is a wide difference between a paradox and a contradiction. Both, indeed, consist of two distinct propositions, and so far only are they alike; for of the two parts of a contradiction the one or the other must necessarily be false; of a paradox both are often true, and yet when proved to be true, may continue paradoxical. This is the necessary consequence of our partial view of things. An intellect to which nothing should be paradoxical would be infinite." So that, brethren, though we know not how the decrees of God are compatible with the responsibility of man, yet inasmuch as we are conscious that we are free agents, the doctrine of election does not trench upon our

practical duty, and should not paralyze the efforts of the human will. If the Bible says in one passage, "It is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure," it says immediately before, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." If our Lord speaks thus at one time: "No man can come unto Me except the Father draw him," He speaks thus at another: "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." If one text assures us that "Christ is exalted to give repentance to Israel, and remission of sins," another commands us to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." If one Scripture saith, "I will give you a new heart," another saith, "Make you a new heart." If one verse tells us we are "dead in trespasses and sins," another summons us to "awake and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give us light." If it is written, "Faith is the gift of God," it is also written, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Thus the decrees of God detract not one jot or tittle from man's responsibility, but leave him as accountable as ever, inasmuch as they leave all his motives to exertion as strong as ever. And if any of you should wish to convert this doctrine into a plea for indolence and security, saying that if there is a certain number to be saved you need not disquiet yourselves about your own salvation, I know not a better way of meeting your argument than by giving you the reply of our Saviour to His apostles when they asked Him, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" and He answered, "Strive *ye* to enter in at the strait gate."

But the question with you as sinners is not "whether by election I am one of the saved," but, "what must I do to be saved?" In the Epistle to the Romans, I find St. Paul saying, "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy." What then? Must I on this account give up all my anxieties, and do nothing? Away with such a thought! The secret decrees of God have nothing to do with the present and practical duties of religion. I turn to another page of Scripture, and I find it written there that I must "escape for my life," that I must "flee from the wrath to come," that I must "flee for refuge to the hope set before me in the gospel." And when I look into other portions still of God's Word, and read that I must "seek the Lord if I would find Him;" that I must turn unto Him if I would have Him turn unto me; that I must "bring forth fruit meet for repentance" if I would be saved; that I must "keep under the body, and bring it into subjection, if I would not be a castaway;"—when I read this, and am bidden to purify myself, "even as He is pure," or I can never see Him, then, in place of speculating whether I am or am not of the election of grace, my wisdom tells me that I must engage strenuously in the work of faith and repentance; and in place of not running because it is "of God that showeth mercy," "run with patience the race that is set before me," because it is by so doing that I shall make sure of the crown of everlasting life.

I do not know that I can better illustrate this truth than from the account given us of the shipwreck of

St. Paul in the Adriatic. In a dreadful storm, accompanied by all that could add to the horrors of the scene, an angel from God assured the apostle that there should be no loss of any man's life, only of the ship. The sailors giving up all hope, in their despair ceased from working the vessel, and resolved to abandon her, leaving the passengers to perish. Then St. Paul, although he knew that none in the ship should be lost, said with all urgency to the centurion and the soldiers, "Unless these men abide in the ship, they cannot be saved." Upon this the soldiers cut the ropes which fastened the boat to the vessel, and the sailors, unable to escape, bending their energies to the work before them, lightened the ship, threw the cargo overboard, loosed the rudder-bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind. It was only by using the necessary means that the purpose of God, made known beforehand to the apostle, was fulfilled. God's sovereignty is seen in the revelation He made known to St. Paul—not a life should be lost; and man's responsibility is seen in the exertions made by the centurion and sailors to save the ship.

The predestination of the Bible fixes all the intermediate steps as well as the final and glorious consummation. When God decrees the end, He decrees also the means. If He elects a man to obtain salvation in the life which is to come, He elects him to the practice of holiness in the life that now is. "Whom He did foreknow He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son." Hence the doctrine which is thought by many to supersede holiness is

the strongest stimulus to renounce sin, and shun temptation; proving that conformity to the Saviour is necessary for all who would enjoy the blessedness of eternity. Holiness here and happiness in heaven are so essentially connected, that if I do not possess the one I shall never reach the other. Without sanctification I have "no part nor lot in the matter;" with it I "make my calling and election sure." It is by grappling with evil; it is by wrenching the heart from the world; it is by studying God's Word; it is by praying for assistance; it is by using the means of grace diligently and perseveringly, that the effect of a blessed predestination is likely to be realized. Let me argue from analogy. It is God alone who gives us fruitful seasons, and makes the seed to shoot and bud and blossom; although to us the breeze and the sun and the dew alone appear to be concerned. But does this supply the work of the labourer, and cultivate our fields? The husbandman knows that if it be the purpose of God to give a plentiful harvest next autumn, "the valleys will laugh, and stand thick with corn;" but will he on that account neglect the processes of agriculture, expecting the ripened grain to clothe with its golden produce the uncultivated farm? The merchant knows that, if it be the purpose of God, the vessel in which he embarks will return laden with a rich profit; but will he therefore sit down inactive, instead of busily shipping his merchandise, and sending it off to its proper destination? The farmer and the merchant are both aware that they cannot possibly succeed if it is predetermined they shall not; but the

former is also aware that without labour on the earth the harvest will never come; and the latter knows that without enterprise and action his vessels will never reach the destined port; and therefore each uses the proper means as busily as if God never decreed anything, and as if man had to do everything. It ought to be the very same in spiritual things as in temporal. The secret decrees of God ought no more to freeze a man into apathy in the solemn and pressing duties of religion than they do in the daily and ordinary duties of life; for it is in the use of means, and in this use alone, that a blessing may be, or ought to be, expected. "The secret" decrees of the eternity past are not to be our motives in religion; it is by "the things which are revealed" in the Bible that our practice is to be influenced. And though, in wishing to "declare to you the whole counsel of God," I have brought before you this doctrine of election, it has not been from any desire to speculate on the counsels of heaven above; I desire rather, now and always, to direct you in your walk on the earth below; and therefore I press upon you anxiously, affectionately, and earnestly the motives of the gospel, with all its invitations and promises and warnings. I tell you, that "unless you repent, you shall all likewise perish." I tell you that God invites all, and forbids none, to come and drink of the fountain of living waters, and if they come, "He will in no wise cast them out." I say unto you, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and ye shall be saved." I lay before you the free offers of the gospel; I assure you that God "waiteth to be

gracious." I am commissioned to declare unto you that "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth from all sin;" and "as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." I bid you press into the kingdom of heaven; and I answer for it, if you do, that you shall infallibly take it by force.

Listen to these exhortations; embrace the mercy of the gospel; and thus shall it be proved that our assembling here this morning has been decreed for high purposes, and that the word spoken was the means God determined to use for your conversion, and your transformation into "new creatures." And if there be any of you who, from a perversion of this mysterious doctrine, are still determined to live carelessly—waiting for the effectual calling of the Holy Ghost, and so making no effort to escape the bondage of corruption—I beseech him not to wrest this truth to his own destruction; but to remember that if the apostle says, as he does in the text, "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His," he equally says, "And let every one that nameth the Name of Christ depart from iniquity."

There are two observations suggested by the whole subject, and with these I shall conclude. If there are any present who cannot agree in the views just stated of this doctrine, to them I would say, only grant that Christ must quicken the sinner before he can be converted; that spiritual life can only come from the Giver of life; that the hand of mercy must pluck the

brand from the burning ; only allow, in fact, that it is in the largest sense " by grace we are saved, through faith, and that not of ourselves : it is the gift of God ; " and we shall not wrangle about the term " election," seeing that you entirely yield the substance.

Our second observation is to those who may think that in the statement of this doctrine I have raised a barrier between them and the rich mercies of Jesus Christ. Oh, let me say that I had rather that the tongue cleaved to the roof of my mouth than that I should place an obstacle between the sinner and the Saviour. God forbid! I invite you to the loving arms, the open heart of Jesus. Christ longs to gather you under the wings of His love ; and there is nothing between you or any man and instant salvation but his own will. "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life," are Christ's own words, is Christ's own complaint. "Men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil." If we are saved, it is through the unmerited mercy of God, who draws us to Himself by the Spirit ; if we are lost, our blood will rest upon our own heads. Man is his own destroyer. And I believe that when the impenitent and unbelieving are excluded from heaven, and the door is shut, of all racking thoughts the most terrible will be this—that if they had been willing, they too might have risen with the saints to an inheritance of light.

Then pray to God that He will make you " willing in the day of His power,"—taking away the heart of stone, and replacing it by a heart of flesh. Let this be your prayer : " Draw us, and we will run after Thee ; turn us, and we shall be turned."

God's Jewels.

"Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."—MAL. iii. 16, 17.

MALACHI was the last prophet of the old dispensation. He lived and prophesied after the Captivity. The temple had been rebuilt and the temple-worship restored. But Israel's greatness was gone. The people had sunk into a state of moral and political degradation. The priests were corrupt, and, as a natural consequence, the people lived the reckless life of those who had lost faith in God. Reverence and purity were things of the past; impurity and corruption prevailed, and ruled in the nation's heart.

But even in these evil times there were a few who had not defiled their garments, or bowed the knee to Baal; a few who were faithful to God, and sought strength in communion with each other. Of these the text speaks: "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written

before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name. And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

In looking at the description of the righteous in Malachi's day, we learn the principle which strengthened them to stand fast amid the overflowing ungodliness of the time: "They that feared the Lord."

We find in the Bible that the lack of a "fear of God" is the mark of the wicked. When David would describe them in one sentence, he says, "Their transgressions show that there is no fear of God before their eyes." It is remarkable that when St. Paul draws a full-length portrait of sinners, painting the picture in the most vivid colours, he puts in the last touch in the words of David: "There is no fear of God before their eyes." On a certain occasion the psalmist has something to say which it would be well for all men to hear. He would gather round him the human race that they might receive instruction from his lips. "Come," he says, "come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord." Not only David, but David's son, Solomon, tells us that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;" and condensing the substance of all his teaching into a few words, he says, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

I may observe, also, that when Isaiah speaks of the

sevenfold gifts of the Spirit that are to rest on the Messiah, the last that he mentions is this: "the fear of the Lord." "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." "The fear of the Lord" is no servile dread, or craven terror, which makes us tremble at the thought of God, and crouch before Him like slaves who would deprecate His wrath. It is a filial fear, springing from a knowledge of His pardoning love in Christ; a holy fear, flowing from the belief that "He has blotted out as a cloud our transgressions, and as a thick cloud our sins." The Apostle Paul says to believers, "Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." St. John says, "Fear hath torment;" "He that feareth is not made perfect in love." "The fear" which was a feature in the character of those who were loyal servants of God in a time of abounding iniquity was a childlike "fear." This kept them true to God in days when their zeal for His truth must have brought down upon them the dislike and enmity of the wicked, and enabled them to overcome the world, clothed with that Divine strength through which all things become possible, and which flows from Him who "out of weakness can make us strong."

Let us consider the "communion of saints." They "spake often one to another." And what was the subject of their discourse? The world's politics, and the world's pleasures? The last entertainment, or

the latest scandal? The newest book, or the latest fashion? It is interesting to note how every age is but a repetition of the last. Men in those days had their feasts, where the viol and the tabret and the harp played an important part, and where they sat over their wine until they had redness of eyes; and they would no doubt then, as now, hold up the glass to the light, and praise its amber or ruby colour, commending its bouquet and flavour, and speaking of the vintage whence it came. And over the wine they would talk of the sports and games, the feastings and pleasures of the hour, and many a jest would go round the board, followed by laughter and glee. Was it of such things as these that "they who feared the Lord" spake when they met together, "and the Lord hearkened and heard"? Women had in those days their ornaments, "their cauls, and round tires like the moon, their chains, and bracelets, and mufflers; their bonnets and broad bands, and tablets and earrings, their rings, and changeable suits of apparel; their mantles, and wimples, and crisping pins, their glasses and fine linen, and hoods and veils." Was it of these that the women who "feared the Lord spake often one to another"? I question it. The Lord would have hardly thought it worth while to bow the heavens and come down "to hearken and hear"—to keep "a book of remembrance" for conversation such as this. It was of higher and better things than these that the holy men and women of old spake: of God, and His grace; His mercy and goodness, His judgments against sin; of His lovingkindness to His people.

There are, of course, many things on which we may converse besides religion. There are many subjects of interest which appeal to the heart and mind. As citizens of the State, we must take a deep interest in the government of the country; its domestic and foreign policy, its literature, its art, its social progress, and scientific discovery. There are a thousand interests which must occupy a Christian man's attention. It is not so much of what we talk, as how we talk, that is of consequence. Our speech is not to be always "of grace," but it should be always "with grace;" it is the tone of our conversation that is all-important; whether or no we honour God by our lips, whether our words are "seasoned with salt that they may minister grace to the hearers." Christian conversation has a boundless range of subjects, all of which interest and instruct. But I have no doubt that the pious Jews to whom Malachi refers, spoke of heavenly things more than earthly. Their words would be of "Him who is glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders;" of the deliverances He had wrought out for Israel, of His mercy that is above the heavens, of His truth reaching unto the clouds. Hopes, too, of the future would mingle with their conversation. The advent of the Messiah daily drawing nearer; the coming of the kingdom "whose peace should flow as a river, and whose righteousness as the waves of the sea;" the glories of the brighter day when, under the beams of the "Sun of Righteousness" who was to arise "with healing in His wings," "the wilderness and the solitary place should be glad, and

the desert should rejoice and blossom as the rose." These, and other subjects of a kindred nature, would be upon their tongues, stirring their souls to thankfulness, and clothing their lips with praise.

Christian brethren, what know we of the communion of saints? What are the subjects which occupy the time when we meet together, in family and social gatherings? Are the events of the day the only topics of conversation? It is natural, as I have said, that we should take an interest in all that is happening about us. We belong to earth as well as heaven, and the things of earth must in a great measure engage our thoughts and claim our attention. To deny this would lead to what is unreal and untrue. But, nevertheless, the things of the world are not to engross our exclusive attention, or hinder that higher communion which we may have as citizens of heaven. Is there anything of this higher and holier communion when you meet together? Of course, I speak to professing Christians. Men of the world speak of the things of the world. It cannot be otherwise. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Their conversation is of the earth, earthy; often foolish and trifling; sometimes worse, often sensual and foul—not unseldom devilish, and set on fire of hell. But, Christian men, let me ask *you*—does Christ and His cause enter into your conversation? Is the progress of His work spoken of? Is His Name referred to? Or do you meet and part, and speak of every other subject; and is the greatest and best entirely excluded? Is there nothing to which the Lord can

"hearken" with satisfaction, or "hear" with delight? Is there no word said which He can put into the "book of remembrance" against the Great Day? I believe from my soul that Christians should encourage more of this speaking to one another, if they wish for a larger measure of strength and encouragement as they travel to heaven. We ought to put away our reserve, and to speak more freely than we do, of our spiritual needs and difficulties—our spiritual progress and hopes. I am sure that it is good for us thus to "speak often one to another;" for "as iron sharpeneth iron, so a man strengtheneth the countenance of his friend." And of one thing I feel certain, that however natural it be when we meet together to speak of what concerns the state of our country—our legal tribunals, of the last book, the newest fashions, or any of the kindred topics of the day—that it is not when we are conversing on such subjects that the Lord comes down amongst us "to hearken and to hear." It is to those who, when they meet, speak of *Him*, and of what concerns His cause and kingdom, that the promise is made, "Where two or three are met together in My name, there am I in the midst of them."

There is great beauty in the words, "the Lord hearkened, and heard it." "To hearken" shows the Lord's desire "to hear." It is as if He bent His ear to catch their words, and was attentive to the tenor of their conversation. There are many things which I "hear" to which I do not "hearken;" but when I hearken, I give my whole attention to what is being

said, and put myself in an attitude to listen. So that when we read, "the Lord hearkened," we are made to feel that He had pleasure and satisfaction in the communion of His people; and this is further intimated by the fact that "a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon His Name."

Writing in "a book of remembrance" recalls a custom of the Persians. We find in the sixth chapter of Esther that it was usual to enter in certain records the names of those who deserved well of the king, with a notice of their meritorious deeds, to the intent that they might be rewarded. It was thus that Mordecai was brought under the notice of King Ahasuerus in a sleepless night when he read the records of his kingdom for his amusement. In like manner the names and actions of the righteous, their sorrows and sufferings for righteousness' sake, are written in a book before God. "Put my tears into Thy bottle," says the psalmist. "Are they not all in Thy book?" Their names were inscribed long before in "the book of life;" and now all they say or do, which is approved of the Master, finds a place in "the book of remembrance." "The word in season spoken to the weary," as well as "the cup of cold water given for His sake to a disciple." Nay, their thoughts are there, too: "for them that thought upon His Name." What a blessed truth! Some may be debarred from Christian communion, may have to lead a lonely life because they have none to enter into their feelings; or they may be confined to the

sick-chamber, or thrown into the gloomy prison. This has happened, and may happen again. But when every other avenue to Christian communion is closed, the door stands open to thoughts of God and prayer. We can always "think" on the Name of the Lord, and find it a strong tower, into which we may run and be safe.

Daniel thought of this Name in the den of lions; the three children in the fiery furnace; Jonah in the belly of the whale; Paul and Silas in their prison, when their feet were made fast in the stocks; martyrs as they have stood on the scaffold, or been stretched on the rack. Neither men nor devils can debar us from thoughts of God—nor death. The tongue may have lost its power of speech, the ear may have lost its hearing, the eyes may be too glazed and dim to read, but the thoughts may still be fastened upon the Name which is above every other—and, indeed, the moving lips of the dying have told the bystanders at a Christian's death-bed that "in the multitude of his thoughts within him God's comforts were delighting his soul." Thanks be to God that, when all the means of grace are closed against us—sabbaths, services, sacraments, sermons, and God's Word either read or preached—thought and prayer still remain. These are gates of access to God that, like those of heaven, "stand open day and night continually." And when all communion with Christian friends is denied us, we can still enjoy fellowship with the Father and with the Son, and "draw near to the throne of grace with a true heart, in full assurance of faith."

In the last place, look at the promise of the seventeenth verse: "And they shall be Mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him." I fasten first upon the words, "My jewels." The figure has much force and beauty when applied to the Lord's people. "Jewels." And whence so called? Because they have been digged out of the pit, and hewn out of the mine; digged from the low and obscure pit of sin, hewn from the dark and deep mine of humiliation. Their origin, like that of the diamond, is of the earth, earthy; and, like it, they would remain without beauty or splendour were they not separated by Divine grace from the clay or rock where they lie embedded, and brought out of darkness into marvellous light.

Again, the diamond has to undergo a rough and rude process before it can glow and sparkle, burning with many-coloured fires, and flashing with matchless lustre. The lapidary must grind it on his flying wheel, and polish it with its own dust before it can pass into the hand of the jeweller to be set in a golden crown, and become a fitting ornament for a monarch's brow. So with the Christian. He must be sanctified and purified, and made meet for the Master's use. By the hammer of His Word, God breaks the heart of stone, and changes it into a heart of flesh. Often He casts the people whom He intends for great honour into the furnace of affliction, where He purifies them in seven-times-heated fires. It is thus that He takes away the dross and refines them;

and through a painful process destroys the power of sin in their hearts, and prepares them for heaven.

Again, they are "jewels," from their *scarceness*. "Many are called, but few are chosen." "Jewels," from their *preciousness*, for they have been purchased with what an apostle calls "the blood of God." "Jewels," from their *destiny*, for they are to sparkle in the "many crowns" which are to adorn the brow of the Redeemer; and though these "jewels" are of varying degrees of brightness, and of different sizes —for, "like stars," they differ from one another in glory—and though the position which they are to occupy in the royal diadem of the Son of God shall be allotted to them according to the measure of their spiritual attainments, yet are they all "precious in the sight of God," and shall be securely kept and safely guarded until that great day when the Lord shall come to "make them up." For these "jewels" are not yet "set." They are scattered abroad—some here and some there, some in this position and some in that—and some have been removed to the treasury above; and if earth is poorer for its loss, heaven is all the richer for its gain. But this separation shall not always continue. Yet a little while, and "the Lord shall gather them together." "He shall say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back." He shall form all His chosen into one shining and brilliant cluster, and give them a brightness exceeding that of the most lustrous constellation of the skies. They shall be "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of their

God." "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in that day; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him."

What is the day here spoken of? It is the day which brings before us the hope of the Church—the day which shall see all things put under the Saviour's feet—the day which shall "burn as an oven," when "all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be as stubble," but when the Lord shall be "glorified in His saints, and admired in all them that believe." The Lord says to you who are now enjoying the communion of saints—who are thinking and speaking of His Name—"You shall be Mine, and I will acknowledge you in the presence of an assembled universe. I will set My seal upon your foreheads." He passes over all the intervening time—this little life, and the rest of the grave, as if these were nothing—and He takes your thoughts from the present, and fills them with the future, and with the grand destiny that awaits you when He shall appear in the clouds of heaven. He would have you "look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Think of that day, He says, "when the heavens shall depart as a scroll when it is rolled together, and the everlasting hills shall pass away, and every island and mountain be moved out of their place, and the great white throne shall be set, and the graves shall give up their dead for judgment." In "that day you shall be Mine." I will save you in the world's con-

flagration as a man may save his fellow from the flames, plucking him out of the fire "as a brand from the burning." Nay, I will save you "as a man saveth his dear and pleasant son who serveth him."

Oh, that day! that great day of the Lord, for which the Advent season is to prepare us—that day for which we preach—that day when the Son of man shall come to receive His people unto Himself, as well as to "take vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." "Who may abide the day of His coming," who shall "bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and make manifest the counsels of the heart," laying bare the inmost thoughts and desires of the soul?

Brethren, are ye ready? Have ye a refuge against the storm, a covert from the tempest when it bursts, and when the last trump, ringing through earth and heaven, awakens the sleepers—when the graves of a thousand generations having given up their dead, all eyes in the vast assembly, with its multitude of human faces, some beaming with joy, and others black with despair, shall be fixed on the great white throne? You will be there, ye men of our clubs and pleasure-haunts, you tenants of its streets and squares; you women that dwell at ease, and whose thoughts are on vanity. Are you prepared for that solemn, that awful day? Shall you be amongst His "jewels"? Shall He say of you, "They shall be Mine"?

Happy are you if you are numbered with His

people—blessed above all that thought can conceive. An eternity of joy awaits you in the presence of God and of the Lamb, among all that are washed, sanctified, and justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God. God grant that it may be so, through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Perfecting Holiness.

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."—2 Cor. vii. 1.

Of what "promises" is the apostle speaking? Those referred to in the closing verses of the last chapter. "As God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters," saith the Lord Almighty."

Such promises are full of grace and blessing, and their exceeding greatness and blessedness should constrain us to flee from evil and do good—to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God."

It is of the first importance to remember that the apostle is addressing true Christians, those who are "sanctified in Christ Jesus, and called to be saints." As all our sufficiency in spiritual things is of God, it

were an act of presumption on our part to attempt to obey His commandments without a hearty and faithful reliance on His "promises." Until we have come to Christ for salvation, and received from Him that Spirit, "without whom nothing is strong and nothing is holy," we cannot even enter on a course of acceptable obedience.

"Let us cleanse ourselves." This "cleansing" is not instantaneous; it is a lifelong work. The time will never come when we shall no longer have occasion to "put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and to put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." We shall have daily to fight against evil, whether in the heart within or the world without; daily to deny self, and "crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts;" daily "to keep under the body, and to bring it into subjection," "working out our own salvation." And in this warfare our success will be more assured if we pray earnestly that the mind may be enlightened to understand clearly the real nature and deformity of sin. If we could see sin as it appears to a holy God, see it in the light in which the elect angels see it, see it in its dark and damning power, it would beget in us both abhorrence and loathing. To show us what it is, to promote feelings of repulsion and disgust towards it, the apostle uses the strong word "filthiness." Sin is like a hideous and abhorrent leprosy, whose foul and fatal ravages on the human face and form cannot be regarded without shrinking. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint; from the

top of the head to the sole of the foot there is nothing but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores." If the eyes of the understanding were opened to discern the natural defilement and pollution of sin, we should see the works of the flesh in their true and awful colours. They would appear in their native hideousness and horror, and we should as soon think of taking some monster of deformity to our arms, as to embrace or be enamoured of vice. Nor would any disguise, however specious, hide its foulness from our view. Corinth, where dwelt the Christians to whom the apostle addresses the words of the text, was one of the most licentious cities of the old world. The Corinthians tried to disguise the deformity of sin under the adornments of art ; to conceal it under the superficial veneer of culture and external refinement. Their poets threw the lovely veil of imagination over the outward form of evil ; their painters endeavoured through the voluptuous picture to excite the senses ; men of pleasure wreathed their wine-cups with roses ; and the gods most worshipped were the incarnations of the lusts and passions of humanity. There was much in all this to enchant the senses and fascinate the imagination. But the apostle was able to look through all this external glitter, and so he tore away the veil that hid the evil from the common view, and exposed the ugliness which it concealed. The sepulchre was indeed whitened and adorned without, but within it was full of all manner of corruption and pollution.

The danger which besets all, and especially the young, is their being liable to be blinded to the real

character of sin. Youth, with passions hungering and thirsting after indulgence, only sees the fair outward mask under which lie concealed the evil and loathsomeness that are its true features.

It is against these fair but deceptive appearances that I would warn you. "In vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird." Suppose what seemed to you a cup of pure and sparkling water were presented to your thirsty lips, and you were about to drink, how you would recoil with horror if suddenly a venomous snake lifted its head out of the cup, and threatened to strike you with its sting!

Brethren, however fair sin may seem to be, be on your guard against it. Try to realize its true character, and avoid its fatal lures. To those who had "yielded their members servants to uncleanness, and to iniquity unto iniquity," who had "sowed to the flesh," the apostle puts the pertinent question, "What fruit had ye in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." By the grandeur of the soul, by the sanctity of religion, by the beauty of holiness, by the solemnity of judgment, let all resolutely gird up the loins of their mind to the work of "cleansing themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

But the cleansing ourselves "from all filthiness *of the flesh*" is but the half of our duty; we must also "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the spirit." We must cleanse the thoughts, those "chambers of imagery," from all that defiles, watching over the

heart, "for out of it are the issues of life," crushing the serpent in the egg, and treading upon the spark lest it burst into a flame. How needful for all is that beautiful prayer contained in the Collect for purity! "Almighty God, unto whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid, cleanse the thoughts of our heart by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit." We must seek positive purity, not only in outward act, but also in the inner suggestion, "purifying ourselves as Christ was pure," and "bringing every thought into captivity to Him." "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they"—and they only—"shall see God." And if we have the pure heart, we shall be strong against evil in all its forms, whether it comes in the shape of the doubtful story, the coarse jest, the remote allusion, the defiling insinuation, or the impure suggestion—against all that would create a stain on that personal purity which is the true strength of man, and the real beauty of woman. Well does the poet speak of the bravery of Sir Galahad, the stainless Knight of the Round Table, when he says—

> "My good blade carves the casques of men,
> My tough lance thrusteth sure;
> My strength is as the strength of ten,
> Because my heart is pure."

I was reminded lately in a little book, that Milton sings of this "purity" as of a militant, sun-clad power, rushing down as a sword of God to smite everything low and base and impure: "purity" as of mountain water, or of living fire, whose very nature it is not

only to be pure itself, but to destroy impurity in others—that passion for all that is "lovely and of good report" which alone will enable us to overcome in the battle against sin. "Unto the pure, all things are pure; but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled."

But the apostle's exhortation reaches not only to the heart, but to *the mind.* The intellect is liable to defilement as well as the body, and we must "cleanse ourselves" no less from mental than from carnal filthiness. This is a truth which needs peculiarly to be enforced in the present day. "Many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased." There never was an age when the idolatry of intellect was more common, or such reverence was paid to mere intellectual gifts. It is an age of scientific discovery, and of marvellous invention. The arts are making each year fresh and startling progress. Criticism is at work upon the high and holy subject of religion; and the hand that is placed on the ark of truth is not always reverential, or even respectful. Old faiths are thrown into the crucible, and the Bible put to the most searching tests. It behoves us, then, to seek from time to time some resting-place whence we can see this mighty stream of human thought sweeping by, and ask ourselves what light does the Word of God throw on the statements of science, or the conclusions of philosophy, and whether in that light they are seen to be pure. For the intellect and reason of man may be, as really as the body, and even more

dangerously so, the seat and the instrument of sin, and that of the very darkest character. Satan, though the author of all sin—"the murderer and liar from the beginning," the great adversary of God and man—is a spirit, and it is a solemn truth that while the sins of the body, defiling as they are, cannot be of the same character as the sins of Satan, the sins of the mind can. And when our Lord mentions a sin which cannot be forgiven, it is plain, though its outward expression is connected with the body, that its real seat is the intellect. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men." It is true that God has been pleased to throw a veil over the precise character of this particular sin —which is probably the wilful rejection of all evidence to the truth—yet surely, whatever be its precise meaning, it must be a sin of the spirit; and if this be so, it deepens the gloom which the Word of God throws round the defilements of the intellect. The means which Satan employed for the ruin of our race was to throw discredit on the Word of God, and thus to tempt Eve to disbelieve His express revelation. "Yea, hath God said," is the insinuation of the subtle tempter, "Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" And when the woman replies, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die," the serpent said, "Ye shall not surely die." And the woman, believing the devil rather than

God, brought sin into the world, and death, which followed hard upon the heels of sin, and "the mourning and lamentation and woe" which has since then been the portion of man. And what lies at the root of all the infidelity that is so rife in the world? Rejection of the Word of God. The unbeliever may be free from sins of the flesh, but if from pride, or vanity, or dislike of the truth, he refuses to believe what the Spirit of God hath spoken, and denies the faith once for all delivered to the saints, is he not guilty of spiritual defilement? Men for the most part think little of intellectual sins, for they present themselves to them in forms of intellectual beauty, and they are flattering to the mental powers; but when you think how "they set themselves up in opposition to God," you will understand how evil and defiling they are. God forbid that I should say a word against the pursuit of knowledge or intellectual excellence! It is becoming such a being as man, made originally in the image of God, to pursue knowledge with a loving zeal, and to attempt the discovery of all that God has revealed through His works. "Knowledge is power," and from Nature it is possible to ascend, by varying steps and stages, to Nature's God. But then it must be ever borne in mind that "the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God;" and that "God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world;" that is to say, when men lean to their own understandings, and leave the written Word for vain speculations, and "oppositions of science falsely so called," they fall into such puerilities and follies, and

moral and religious falsehoods, as are "foolishness" indeed. The name of Science is prostituted and brought into contempt when the only standard of truth is forgotten or slighted, and when anything is exalted into the place of "the lively oracles," though man may admire, God condemns; for the mind, which appears to the idolizers of intellect to be clad in a radiant vestment of intellectual light, is, in the sight of God, really clothed in the polluted garments of the filthiness of the spirit. And when speaking on intellectual sins, let me remind you that the pernicious effects of these intellectual sins are far more widely spread than any defilements of the flesh can possibly be. Sins of the flesh can only reach to those who are within the immediate sphere of our personal influence. But it is far otherwise with the sins of the spirit. Like the spirit, they overleap the boundaries of time and space. The body may have mouldered for centuries in the grave, and all that was offensive in physical corruption have been resolved ages ago into its original elements; but long after the man is dead, the words that he has spoken or written—the outcome of his unbelieving mind—may be doing incalculable injury in the world. Milton, to quote him again, writes strongly on this point. "Books," he says, "are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them as active as that soul whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them." And in this lies the close resemblance between what is evil in the intellect

of man, and the restless, unceasing, ever-present activity of "the prince of the power of the air." The works of an unholy and misguided intellect can reach everywhere. "He being dead, yet speaketh," may be applied to the bad as well as the good. His words, embedded in his books, may reach to the palace, and be found in the cottage; they may appear in the library of the wealthy, and lie on the shelves of the poor; they may poison the minds of the old and the young; they may be translated into various languages; and many in every age, till time shall be no more, be exposed to peril through the dire effects of the pollution of one man's spirit. And the greater the vigour of the unsanctified intellect, the wider, the more lasting, the more dangerous the evil. The mischief thus caused by some of the most acute, the most imaginative, the wittiest, and the most learned minds, but proves the relationship of the intellect to the common source of evil, and utter in our ears the solemn warning to "cleanse yourselves from all filthiness of the spirit." Yes, "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit" we are to "cleanse ourselves." And not only are we called on to do this, but to "perfect holiness in the fear of God."

Although "holiness" is the work of the Spirit of God in the heart, yet are we to "perfect it"—"to follow after it"—in the fear of God. That is, in the filial fear of God; not in slavish terror, but in child-like dread of grieving His Holy Spirit—that Spirit "by which we are sealed unto the day of redemption." To "perfect holiness in the fear of God!" How

exalted is this view of Christian duty, and how thankful should we be to God for setting before us so glorious an object for which to live from day to day! for perfect holiness, though never attained upon earth, is still held forth as the grand object of our daily endeavour. Life without an object is "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." Here, then, is a grand object—the grandest, the most glorious that can be proposed to man. It is nothing less than the gradual restoration of the image of God that was lost by the Fall, but which, through the sanctifying power of the Divine Spirit, is being restored to them who are in Christ Jesus. Day by day the arduous but delightful work is to be carried on. There are no duties in life so pressing into which the "perfecting holiness in the fear of God" may not enter; none so trifling and minute in which some nearer approach to the lineaments and perfections of our Divine Master may not be attained. "Whether we eat, or drink, or whatsoever we do, we may do all to the glory of God." And so, "looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith," and seeing in Him the real beauty of holiness—the image of all perfection—and "with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, we are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Happy are they who are thus being changed! They are ever reflecting more and more of the image of Him who was "holy, harmless, and undefiled, and separate from sinners." They are carrying on a work which in this world will never be finished. They count not

themselves as perfect. Each day and each hour brings its own special duty; and so "forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, they press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And when "the mark is reached," and "the prize is gained," then they shall in reality be "perfect" in Christ for evermore. "They shall be Mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up My jewels."

"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."

Quit you like Men.

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."—1 Cor. xvi. 13.

Religion does not consist in a loud profession, since words cannot always be taken as an index of the state of the heart. They conceal just as much as they reveal what is passing in the thoughts. St. Paul tells us there may be a piety which is no better than "a sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." Shallow streams are ever the noisiest. It is the deep river that is calm and tranquil in its flow. A drum, when beaten, sounds loud, but then a drum is hollow. Go to the fields where the yellow harvest is about to fall to the flashing sickles of the reaper, and you will find that the lightest ears stand erect, while the fullest bend their drooping heads. It is not they who make the loudest profession of religion who are the most consistent. Still, the hollowness of some professors is no good reason for our not confessing Christ at all. A Christian is "the candle of the Lord," and a candle is lighted that it may be seen. We are to "let our light shine" out clearly and brightly before men.

Though it is not needful to be always speaking about religion, it is needful to be always feeling its influence, and our speech, if not always *of* grace, is to be, according to St. Paul's direction, always "*with* grace." If bad men "glory in their shame," good men are not to be ashamed of their glory. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." That religion is something more than a profession, something beyond a doctrine or a dogma; that it is a life, and includes in it vigilance, steadfastness, manliness, fidelity, courage, is evident from the apostle's words: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

"Profession brings with it great responsibility." Let no one be too hasty in coming forward to make a profession; rather let him "sit down and count the cost," for all connected with God and with Christ, with the soul and with eternity, demands our most thoughtful and solemn consideration. A loud profession needs much grace to carry it out consistently. Up in the hills I have seen a giant oak, lofty and with spreading branches, that has gone down before the fury of a storm that passed harmless over many of its more lowly fellows in the valley. The workman who builds the lofty spire must not lay the foundation in shallow sand, or else, when the floods rise and the tempests blow, great will be the fall thereof. The ship which carries much canvas must have her keel deep down in the waters, or her swelling sails will only serve as a lever and purchase for the

wind, and she will sink, overwhelmed in the yawning deep. And thus will it fare with the high but hollow professor of religion. The depth of his fall will be proportioned to the height of his profession. Here let me say, "Remember Judas." Although he joined the company of the disciples, he was false at heart, and never in reality loved his Divine Master. His life was a daily lie. He wore a continual mask. Better for himself that he had never been a follower of Christ. Better, a thousand times better, that he had acted as a thorough man of the world, and made money and trafficked for gain, living in pleasure, and minding earthly things, and abjuring the society of Jesus altogether, for had he not been a disciple he would not have had the opportunity of betraying his Master. It was because he followed Christ, and was His "familiar friend," that he was able to make his unrighteous bargain with the chief priests, and betray the Son of man with a kiss, selling Him for thirty pieces of silver. His very privileges as a disciple gave him opportunity for his crime. His discipleship was the rock on which he made shipwreck of his soul! Beware of lightly professing to take upon you the yoke of Christ. Not that I would deter any true man here from confessing Christ before men, or from resolving, by the grace of God and the aid of the Holy Spirit, to take up the cross and deny yourself daily, and follow Jesus. No! God forbid! No! I call on you to play the man for the people. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

We may regard the words of my text as battle-

words. It is, indeed, a war-cry. "Watch ye," like sentinels at their posts, lest ye be taken off your guard. "Stand fast in the faith;" keep your ground against all assaults of the enemy. "Quit you like men," and flee not like weak and cowardly things before the foe. "Be strong;" let not your courage fail, but gird up your loins for victory. All need to take the words to heart. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." What the Christian life was in the days of Paul, the Christian life is now in our own. Does not that holy Sacrament in which the infant is publicly received into the Church of Christ touchingly declare this truth? At the sacred font the minister of God takes the unconscious babe into his arms, and having sprinkled water on his brow, and baptized him in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, he proceeds still further to sign him with the sign of the cross, "in token that he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, and manfully to fight under His banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end." The entrance of the infant into the Church seals him unto warfare. Through life he is pledged to be a soldier. And there is a needs-be here! Sin is everywhere—within, without. The world in its enmity to the Christian is the same that it ever was. And the "good fight of faith" is to be waged even unto the end. For there is no

discharge in this warfare. "The offence of the cross is not ceased." The mode of warfare may in some respects be changed, not the warfare itself. In the times when St. Paul wrote, there was, as regards human wars, the Grecian phalanx and the Roman legion—the battle-axe and the spear; but, since that, these have given place to the battalion and the brigade —the rifle or the gun; so the method of Christian warfare is altered, but the battle itself has still to be fought, for though the mode of warfare is different, the enemies are the same. In the olden times, the world showed its hatred to the Christian by drawing the sword to smite, and lighting the stake to burn the body to ashes, and by subjecting the writhing limbs to torture worthy only the devilish invention of a fiend. This cruel persecution, thank God, has ceased. Here, in happy England, at least, we can sit under our own vine and fig tree, no man making us afraid. It is easy for me to come into this pulpit, and preach without let or hindrance "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." It is easy for you to come into this sanctuary with Bible and Prayer-book in your hands, and worship the Lord in peace, and listen to the glad tidings of salvation. But this would not have been always possible. In the dark days of old men carried their lives in their hands when they assembled for worship; sometimes in the gloomy catacomb, sometimes on lonely moor, or in solitary glen; and well was it if the solemn psalm was not interrupted by the fierce cry of the persecutor as he broke in upon this gathering of saints.

Though there is nothing of this now, yet is there still a fight to be waged with a world "lying in the wicked one." The world has somewhat changed its tactics. It attacks the good soldier of Jesus Christ with blandishments, not blows. It seeks to overcome by its favours, not its frowns; by its smiles, not its swords. And the Christian warrior is exposed to greater danger from this method of assault. Have we not prayed that God would "deliver us in all times of our wealth, as well as in all times of our tribulation"? Many a man who would have defied the persecution of the world, had fallen before its allurements. Need I remind you of that champion of Israel, Samson? He who singly would not have quailed before a hundred bearded men, all clothed in steel; he who, with the jawbone of an ass as his weapon, slew a thousand, and laid them heaps upon heaps, was vanquished by the charms of Delilah, and lay in her lap shorn of all his strength. A woman, bland, beautiful, and smiling, was his bitterest foe. So with the world. It is not now like the roaring lion, which threatens to devour, but rather like the cunning serpent, which glides into the bosom that it intends to sting, and fascinates in order that it may kill. But, though speaking thus, I would not be understood as saying that the world has any more love for Christ and His people now than it had in the olden time. Far from it. The world has still its frowns and its sneers—often its active persecution—for those who, opposing its maxims, will not be the slaves of its fashions and opinions, and who, breaking

loose from its trammels, endeavour to "live godly in Christ Jesus." And it is a hard thing to face raillery and ridicule; it requires a great deal of moral courage to witness a good confession in presence of the scorner, and to confess Christ crucified with unshrinking fortitude. The man who would stand in the evil day often goes down before a laugh; and I sometimes think if we were more true to God, more honest in opposing the world for its good, we should have rougher times than we now know, and have much less reason to read with apprehension the words of Jesus, "Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you!" Which of us, alas! has not been guilty in our conduct towards the world? Which of us has not, at times, been tempted to be ashamed of Christ? Which of us has not kept silence when silence was sin, for fear of bringing down upon ourselves reproach, and of giving others offence? We must dare to be faithful as well as singular. "Be not conformed to this world." "Ye are a peculiar people;" and if not a peculiar people, ye are not Christians. Oh, how needful to remember this, and to give heed to the stirring battle-cry, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong"!

I remark again, that in this war we must "endure hardness." There are so many difficulties in the Christian life; so many enemies on the right hand and on the left; so much opposition to deter, and so many temptations to detain, that I can fully enter into the solemn question of the Apostle Peter, "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the un-

godly and the sinner appear?" I confess I feel the deepest sympathy with the young, with those who are just commencing the holy war for God against the world. How hard for them, untried, inexperienced, to stand in the evil day; to be always on their guard against the wiles of the devil; so to wrestle with sin and temptation as to overcome; so to fight the battles of their Lord and Master that defeat shall be the exception and victory the rule! How much of help and tenderness and sympathy do they require from those who, through long proof and trial, know the hardship of the warfare! And how carefully should Christian parents shield their youth from temptation, and remove all stumbling-blocks and hindrances from their path! Never should they consult for their worldly advancement at the hazard of their highest interests. Educational accomplishments, choice of pursuits, friendships and alliances, should be all subordinated to the one thing needful. Spiritual danger is to be as much dreaded and avoided as bodily infection. Is there a young man or maiden here who, thrown a stranger on this town, has forgotten and flung to the winds the gentle and wholesome discipline—the safe and necessary restraint of their father's and mother's home? Be warned! There is neither peace nor pleasure in the downward path from innocence to sin, from sin to sorrow, from sorrow to the second death. Do not forget the bright and happy days when ye knelt in prayer to God and read the sweet story of His love. Rather break loose from bad companions than break a mother's heart. Rather disappoint the

expectations of the wicked than disappoint the bright hopes of ministers and friends. Rather endure the frown of the evil than forfeit the favour of the good. "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die?" Turn ye before ye are as the dead, and "lost to life, and use, and name, and fame," and buckle on your armour for the fight in the strength of God, and through the mercy of Jesus. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

The words of my text form a noble motto for all. Would that every Christian man might make them the rule of his life! So doing, we should fight this battle with a good hope. No forlorn hope is this. When we think of the stake for which we fight, and the strength which we are promised, and of Him who is the Captain of our salvation, and of that Holy Spirit who is on our side, surely we may boldly resist evil and fear not. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" If God's presence go with us, and God's smile cheer us on, what should prevent us from taking up the words of David, and saying, "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the Strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" "Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain." Many a man of God has found the difficulties which he dreaded disappear as he has firmly met them in the Name of the Lord. Valleys have been exalted, and mountains and hills laid low; "the crooked has been made straight, and the rough places plain." And of this I am certain, that the man who, in the face of danger

and loss bears a consistent testimony to Christ, will compel the respect even of those who oppose him, and win the approval of the enemy. The world admires consistency, and cannot help giving its applause to those who refuse to compromise principle, or to swerve one jot from the path of unwavering rectitude and truth. Nor, brethren, will ye find yourselves alone if you stand up valiantly for God. Your conduct will have an influence on others, and will elicit sympathy where, perhaps, it was least expected. There is an unconscious influence which we exercise on those around. There is a mighty magnetic power in the courageous example, even of the weakest, which exerts a direct and decided influence upon others. I have read of a young soldier-boy who went to battle and to bivouac, fighting in the service of his queen and his country, and who, by his Christian behaviour, so gained the respect and won the admiration of his company, that when he fell in the bloody strife, he was carried to the grave amidst a regiment's tears. I have heard of another soldier-boy, whose history is not written, who, by his holy and heavenly example, so won the esteem of all, that in his presence the bad word was never spoken, the foul oath was restrained, the indecent jest was silenced, and the profane witticism provoked no smile. Such is the strength of purity, that defenceless women have gone down into the abodes of wretchedness and sin, and subdued and softened men in their roughest and rudest state, and have won the most degraded from the paths of vice into the ways of a bright and blessed and happy life.

I summon you, one and all, to come forward and fight the battle of the Lord. "Who is on the Lord's side—who?" Oh, "quit you like men"—that is, "be manly." What says the Apostle Peter? "Add to your faith virtue," or, as the word may be more strictly rendered, "courage," "boldness," "manliness." The young like to be thought "manly." There are many things that they will do, some of them, which had better be left undone—following "customs more honoured in the breach than in the observance"—in order to be considered "manly." But here is a noble sphere for the exercise of Christian manhood. Here is finest room and scope for the highest and the truest manliness. Be courageous for God and for Christ. In this battle ye do not fight alone. If ye have a triple band of foes to overcome—the world, the flesh, and the devil—ye have a Trinity of Persons in whose strength to do battle, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. The sympathies of the best are with you. Good angels are on your side, and heavenly armour, even the "whole armour of God," is placed at your acceptance. Taking this, clothing yourselves with this, you cannot fail of the victory; for there is no arrow that the devil ever forged in the hottest fires of hell which "the helmet of salvation" shall not be able to resist; and no "fiery dart" that the wicked one ever hurled that the "shield of faith" shall not be able to "quench." And the prize here is not a decoration, a ribbon, or a star, or a cross, but a crown immortal, a prize rich enough to reward your watching and prayer, your tears and toils,

the self-denial you exercise, the sorrows you suffer. And for your wounds there is the blood of Christ, that precious blood which "cleanseth from all sin." And do we not need it? Which of us can war in this warfare and not receive some defeats and scars? Which of us, with so corrupt a nature, can preserve his heart entirely undefiled from sin and stain? Not one of us—not the best of us. I thank God, then, for the blood, the blood which can make the scarlet white as snow, and the crimson as wool. And here is the fountain flowing as freely, as fully, as ever. Here all may wash and be clean; and, washing, you shall know the blessedness of the man "whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." And not only is there pardon for the past, but grace for the future. "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might," and you will overcome every enemy of your souls. A little child, with God at his side, is mightier than the devil and all his angels. "He that is with us is greater than all that be against us." United by a saving faith to Christ, bound to Him in a close and living union, who or what can separate us from His love? "Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Therefore be strong and of a good courage. With

Christ your Captain and your Friend, "all things must work together" for your good. Break away from your sins, and taking unto you the whole armour of God, throw yourselves into this battle. If indeed you would be saved, you have no choice. They only that use the sword on earth shall bear the palm in heaven; nor shall any but they who clothe themselves in armour here be clad in the white robe hereafter. The crown is for saints, not for sinners; not for cowards, but for conquerors—and how can you conquer unless you fight? All the promises are made to them that overcome. "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne." I send you to your homes with the war-cry ringing in your ears: "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

Worldliness and Weariness.

"I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit."—ECCLES. i. 14.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."—ROM. viii. 28.

WE have a striking contrast in these two utterances. The one is the confession of a man who regards the world with dissatisfaction and discontent. His words are full of a bitter sadness, a pathetic melancholy. Despondency and weariness are his one theme. He is weary of all things under the sun; weary of knowledge, of greatness, and wealth; weary of his palaces and gardens, of his amusements, his pleasures and joys. He is weary of the monotony of the earth, the rising and the setting of the sun, of the blowing of the wind, and the blooming of the flowers; weary of the unchanging rivers which are ever running to the sea. Better to be amongst the dead than amongst the living, for these are oppressed, and weep, and have no comforter. But better still is "he that hath not yet been, who hath not seen the evil work that is

done under the sun." "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

The other utterance is that of a man who has found his satisfaction in God. Knowing the righteousness, and power, and infinite love of God revealed in Christ, he was happy in the present, confident about the future, and at rest about the past. He had an unmeasured faith in God. There was suffering, tribulation, persecution—but what of that? In the midst of all he could sing the triumphant song, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." And why? Because he was assured that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

The weary words of Solomon find their echo in the words of David, when he tells us, "There be many that say, Who will show us any good?" The cry does not come from some single soul that is soured and disappointed, whose desires are ungratified, or whose hopes are unfulfilled. It is the cry of "many." The strange and piteous confession is heard all round; it is an universal complaint. Wherever you go, you find men "hewing out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water," and from which they turn in weariness and in disgust, with an aching void in the disappointed heart. This is true of all who pursue happiness, and look for it where it cannot be found—in the world. Men fix their aspirations on various objects, some more earthly, and some less; some in

themselves good, and some evil; but the wished-for satisfaction never comes, or, if it is theirs for a moment, it soon dissolves and passes like the empty bubble on the shining stream. The man of the world lives in a vain creation of his own imagination, ever expecting that to-morrow will be better than to-day. He has been pursuing a shadow which has ever eluded his grasp. He looks back on days gone by, and years passed away; but he is as far as ever from the happiness that he desired. It has not come. He feels, to his sorrow, that the definition which has been given of happiness is only too true: "Happiness is the keen to-morrow of the mind." Disappointed for the first thirty or forty years of his life, but still willing to be cheated, he fondly fancies that it is before him, and that it will yet be his own. He is like the man in the story who, eager to find the spot from which the arch of the rainbow sprang, and expecting that there he would discover rich bars of ruddy gold, made this the object of his existence; and at last, though often baffled, reached the very place where the radiant beams touched the ground, but reached at the same time the termination of his life, and felt as he stretched out his hands to grasp the rainbow that he was grasping his own grave.

It is thus that many a man's life is spent. He "walks in a vain show, and disquiets himself in vain;" perhaps heaping up riches, or attaining to honour, and at the same time confessing in his inmost heart that they do not satisfy; perhaps cultivating literature, or pursuing art; perhaps living what is in sad

mockery called "a gay life," yet ever obliged to adopt as his own experience the words of the eloquent Bolingbroke: "I have enjoyed all the pleasures of the world, and know their futility, and do not regret their loss." Thus the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear with hearing, and so at last there comes the end, and from the solemnities of his death-bed he looks back upon the experience of many years, and confesses that he found nothing in the world worth living for, that "all was vanity," and most things "vexation of spirit."

This is confirmed by the Bible, which is not only a book of principles, but a biography. Here you find a sort of microcosm—a bird's-eye view of the world; men pass before you as in a moving panorama, and they give you their experience as they pass by. They all tell us that nothing outside a man, nothing external to him, can really give him satisfaction and contentment. Jacob, Job, Abraham, Lot, David—their inner joy did not flow from their flocks and herds, from their riches or possessions, from their families or friends. They were all sorely troubled in their domestic relations, and had to acknowledge that "many are the afflictions of the righteous." "Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been," says one. "Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward," says another. "The troubles of my heart are enlarged," cries a third. And if we take Solomon, the most magnificent of the Jewish kings, as an instance of a man who had everything which this world can give, we see the truth I am

enforcing exemplified in a manner the most forcible and striking. He tells us in the second chapter of Ecclesiastes what he did to make himself happy. He constructed great works, builded houses, and planted vineyards; he made gardens and orchards, and planted trees of all kinds of fruits; he made pools of water for the watering of the trees; and got him servants and maidens; he gathered also treasures of silver and gold. "Nay," he says, "whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour." So the splendid scene rose before him as he recalled the past, and shone in all brightness and beauty; and then the whole, at one touch from the hand of reality, passed away and melted into nothingness, like the glittering palace of ice reared for a Russian empress, and there remained only on the dissolving ruins this single moral inscribed, "Behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun."

But why call Solomon from the dead to witness to this truth? Let him rest in his grave. There is no one with grey hairs on his head who cannot bear the same testimony from his own experience. He knows how "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable" are the pursuits which make up the tenor of our commonplace lives, when there is nothing in them of God; and how hollow, vain, and unsatisfactory are those frivolous pleasures and dissipations which perish in the using, choke the Word, and make it unfruitful,

and which are "not of the Father, but of the world." These are the things which hold men back from the true end of their existence. The truth is that we cannot be satisfied or be made happy by *things*, by the objects of time and sense, however great or good they may be in themselves. Can you fill a sieve with water, or the grave with dead, or the sea with rivers? No! and you cannot fill the soul made for God with anything less than God.

And from ignorance of this truth men pass through life, pursuing shadows, sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind—the whirlwind of disappointment and dissatisfaction, wearied with the phantom chase, sick of gaieties and tired of toil, yet still feverish about some new plan or ambition, and unwilling to the last to be taught that nothing can fill up the hollowness of the soul but God. It is well if men discover this before it be too late. It is well if, before they die, and regret and remorse become eternal, they are driven back, like the prodigal, by famine, hunger, and thirst, and disappointment, to the Father—to Him who does not reject the wanderer, worthless as he is, or refuse to receive him to His heart again. For, brethren, the secret of all dissatisfaction with earthly things lies in the very grandeur of man—in this, that the soul which was made for God cannot be filled by the world. Let a man live without God, and no matter what else he may have, however great his riches, or dignified his rank, or distinguished his position, his heart must acknowledge a void, and weariness must be the result. In settling down

contented with the love of the world he is turning aside from the living bread to feed upon husks, which are not food for man, and fit only for the swine. It is this, and nothing short of this, that Solomon confesses in the passage before us, which, if translated into the language of modern times, would be this, "Is life worth living?" He shows us a picture of men seeking after happiness, some in this direction and some in that; but each, like Solomon, confessing that "all is vanity," or uttering the sad and weary cry, "Who will show us any good?" What a gulf between this and the triumphant words of the apostle, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose"!

We may receive it as an axiom that happiness is only to be found in God—God permits it to be found nowhere else. He sends the worm into the greenest gourd that it may wither, and that we may be forced to seek for shelter under the shadow of the great Rock. He breaks our self-hewn cisterns that we may be compelled to drink at "the fountain of living waters." He shatters our cherished idols that we may turn to Him for strength and consolation. He does it all in mercy, that we may find "all our fresh springs in Him," and make Him not only "all our salvation," but "all our desire."

Ah, brethren, it is our very shame that, instead of being won by the invitations and promises of the gospel, and by the love of God manifested in His dear Son, we must be driven to God by disappointment

and disquiet, by sadness and adversity. When everything is bright and joyous, and youth and health are with us, and life seems an endless and happy vista, then God is forgotten, and the world is all in all. But when God has a purpose of mercy to us, He sends trial and disappointment, and loss and bereavement; He makes the reeds on which we leaned to break down beneath us—ay, to pierce us through and through with many sorrows, that we may find our rest in Him, and Him alone. And when we do come to Him in prayer, when He "lifts up the light of His countenance upon us," then half our trouble is gone, and our sores are healed. We are able to lean on an everlasting sympathy, and to trust to an everlasting love. God is looked upon as a Friend and a Father, and we trust in Him to guide us through the wilderness to the promised land. In the light of His countenance we see His pardoning love, His kindness, His condescension, His goodness, His mercy, and His justifying grace. In the light of His countenance we go on our way calmly and confidently, able to look a host in the face, and to say with David, "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation; whom shall I fear? the Lord is the Strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"

Brethren, this is blessedness, "the light of God's countenance lifted up upon us," shining into our hearts, shedding illumination on the narrow path which leadeth onward and upward to the eternal day. What blessing had the priest in the Old Testament dispensation so rich, so full, so desirable,

as this: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace"? And was it not the felt presence of this "light" that sustained the saints and worthies of old, when they were troubled, cast down, tossed with doubts, and oppressed? Did not this uphold them, and send them on their way rejoicing? When Stephen was put to a cruel and ignominious death, did not the Christ for whom he was about to die set His illuminating seal upon the face of His servant, so that it became "as the face of an angel"?

> "He heeded not reviling tones,
> Nor sold his heart to idle moans,
> Though scorned, and mocked, and bruised with stones;
> But, looking upward, full of grace,
> He prayed, and from a happy place,
> God's glory smote him on the face."

Yes, it is "the light of God's countenance" reflected in the face of Jesus Christ; it is a clear vision of eternity, and of the great glory of God, which imparts strength for every day's duty, that guides us in all our walk, and helps us in all our work. It gives to us the very life of life, and sheds around us that light of which the poet speaks—

> "The light that never was on sea or land."

Every blessing, every happy affection, every tender touch of kindred souls, is a ray from the well-spring of light, and a foretaste of the fountain-head. If we are children of the light and of the day, we need have no fear, because we have had our hearts made

joyful by Him of whom it is said, "The Lord will command His lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life." So that while we see others going about weary and disappointed, seeking one source of happiness after another, and always turning away dissatisfied, let us be thankful and humble if we have found, through mercy, that peace which the world cannot give, and let us say,—in answer to that universal and plaintive cry, "Behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit;"—let us say, with increased fervour and desire, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose," and add, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us."

Do you ask this question, "Who will show us any good?" With the Bible in my hand, I say to you with all confidence, "I will show you 'good;' the highest, the best, the most enduring 'good.'"

It is a "good," remember, that is wholly independent of everything connected with this world. It has nothing to do with temporal gifts or with physical enjoyment. It lies in another sphere, and affects other interests altogether. ~~Look at the verse which follows this text. What says David here?~~ "Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased." "Corn and wine" may delight, but they do not satisfy; they are pleasant things, but they can remove no sorrow from the heart, no anxiety from the soul, or dry one

tear upon the cheek. And there are many in this world who have little of these things; their lot is poverty and grinding care. They may envy those who have the good things of earth, who possess the large mansion or the handsome carriage, who have grounds and gardens that bring forth abundantly, and whose garners are filled with all manner of store. They envy, because they little know what may be the sorrows and sufferings of men of the world, what gaunt skeletons may be in their cupboards; what Mordecai may sit at their gate, whose presence turns all their enjoyments to bitterness; what sadness and aching of heart may be their portion, what darkness and distress in the midst of their luxury and indulgence. And even if their lot be comparatively free from great sorrow, they are just as restless as you who envy them. But the Bible offers you a happiness which is independent of all worldly things, and which no pain or uncertainty can dash. You know the story of the rich man who was "clothed in purple and fine linen," and who fared sumptuously every day, and of the poor beggar clad in rags, who was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from his luxurious table, and you will remember that, whereas there was no real light or blessing *within* the house, *outside* the sunshine of God's heaven, which fell on all around, fell upon the beggar too, as he sat on the doorstep, and that he was the one to be envied while Dives was to be pitied. The rich man was torn away from his pomp and pride, and lifted up his eyes in

hell. Lazarus was carried away from his hunger and disease to Abraham's bosom.

Brethren, I will show you "good," but it is in God as manifested in Christ. Oh, come and draw with joy out of the wells of salvation! In Christ is everything that you want—honour that never fades, crowns that never tarnish, laurels that never wither, rivers of pleasure that summer's heat cannot dry and winter's frost cannot bind; riches that the moth cannot corrupt, or the thief break through and steal. "Happy is the people that is in such a case; yea, blessed are the people who have the Lord for their God." "In His favour is life, and His lovingkindness is better than life." "The light of God's countenance" lights up even the darkest places and the dreariest scenes; it has irradiated a dungeon before now; it illumines the valley of the shadow of death, and sheds a glory over the gloom of the grave. In this scene of death and change let me urge you to make Jesus "all your salvation and all your desire." Let me counsel you to "walk by faith, not by sight." To the eye of faith how is the aspect of all things transfigured! How are all things touched and beautified by the light of an infinite and eternal world! Faith sees glory rising out of tribulation, and crowns springing from crosses. In the flames of the furnace she recognizes one like the Son of man walking with her through the fire; through the spray of the storm she sees the great Pilot at the helm, guiding the ship to the haven where it would be. In the death, from which nature shrinks with instinctive fear, she con-

fronts no grim and ghastly enemy, but welcomes a friend come to bring the exile home. The whole framework of the world seems in her estimation like the properties and scenery of a stage soon to be removed and laid aside. She looks forward and anticipates the time when all these things shall be dissolved ; and so, longing for a more enduring portion, she rises above the world, and taking hold on the eternal—you may see her calm and undaunted ; and as others cry, "Who will show us any good?" "All is vanity and vexation of spirit,"—you may hear her saying, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us."

And so "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

Rebekah.

"And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go."—GEN. xxiv. 58.

THE narrative in this chapter is full of the deepest interest. It presents us with an old-world story, which takes us back into the remote and distant past. The scenes depicted are striking from their very simplicity; their romance delights the imagination, while their pathetic beauty touches the heart.

Sarah is dead. The patriarch has been bereaved of the fair wife of his youth, and three whole years are devoted to mourning the loved and lost. Her death warns Abraham of the passing away of his own generation, and recalls him to the duty of providing for the permanence of the chosen seed. Anxious to find a wife for Isaac, that his line may be perpetuated, the patriarch sends his confidential servant to Padan-aram, to his own kindred, in search of a fitting helpmeet for his son. Isaac must not be "unequally yoked" with one of the daughters of the land; and the man is made to swear that he will not seek a wife for him among any of the tribes of

Canaan, and that he will not take him back to the land of his kindred beyond the Euphrates.

The ambassador, if I may so call him, taking a stately caravan of ten laden camels, with their drivers, sets out on his mission. The journey was a long, and not always safe route, seeing that predatory bands of the wandering tribes often attacked the traveller as he crossed the desert. Under the protection of God, the trusty messenger in due time reaches Mesopotamia, and finds himself before sunset outside the city of Nahor, the place where he is to seek a wife for the child of promise. He halts beside a well close to the city. It is evening, the time when the women of the country go out to draw water. In the still and quiet hour he turns to God in prayer, and committing his way unto the Lord, reverently asks Him to bless the plan that suggests itself to his mind for discovering the maiden who will be a suitable wife for his master's son. "Behold, I stand here by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water: and let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: let the same be she that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast showed kindness unto my master." There was much practical wisdom shown by Abraham's steward in the token that he asked for. It would not only secure the guidance of God in his important embassy, but it would be a test calculated

to prove the kindly nature of her of whom he was in search. In those olden times they walked in a great measure by sight; and God, to sustain their hope, was often pleased to give them visible tokens of His favour and approval. We live under a different dispensation. It is our higher privilege to walk altogether by faith. We expect no signs from heaven to flash before our eyes, no voice from heaven to sound audibly in our ears. The pillar of cloud is gone; the pillar of fire is no more. We have, indeed, the great privilege of prayer; and can cast all care, doubt, and perplexity upon Him who careth for us, and who has said, "Acknowledge Me in all thy ways, and I will direct thy paths." And having thus sought that Divine guidance which is never withheld from any who ask in faith, we must then exercise a wise discretion and a sound judgment as to the path to be pursued, and the counsel to be followed.

In looking at this interesting story, I would say, in the words of St. Paul, when referring to the history of Sarah and Hagar, and in the same sense—"Which things are an allegory"—may be treated in an allegorical or spiritual manner, as thus: We who are "ambassadors for God" go out to woo and win a Bride for our Master's Son. "It is required in a steward that he be found faithful." In prayer and faith we go forth; in faith and prayer we deliver our message. In the discharge of our high office we endeavour to persuade men by the promises of the gospel; and, proclaiming the message of reconciliation, would draw the lost and the wandering to our Master's feet.

"Come unto Him," we say, "Come unto Him, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and He will give you rest." We ask no sign from heaven as to the men and women who will be won to the Saviour's arms. "We draw the bow at a venture," not knowing to what heart the arrow may pierce. But we plead with God for men, and with men for God. We pray that the Saviour whom we preach may find favour with many a heart, and a reception in many a soul, and that sinners made "willing in the day of His power," may yield themselves captives to His love.

To turn again to the story. The prayer of the steward is answered. It is answered before he has done praying. It is a remarkable illustration of the words of Isaiah: "It shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear." As the words are on his lips, behold Rebekah with the free step of a chieftain's daughter, and in the springtime of her youthful beauty, approaches the well with her pitcher gracefully poised on her shoulder. "The damsel was very fair to look upon, a virgin . . . and going down to the well, she filled her pitcher, and came up." It is a striking scene, and one common at the present day in the East. We have it in our mind's eye: The wearied stranger standing by the well; the exhausted camels kneeling at a little distance; the solitary damsel with the waterpot on her shoulder coming near in the tender flush of the evening after-glow to draw water. Running to meet her, the servant

asks for a little water from her pitcher. And what said she? With beaming face and generous pleasure, she replies, "Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink."

See how she manifests all the tokens of a fine and generous nature.

Brethren, there is an aristocracy of noble qualities as well as of birth. Some have large and gracious hearts: are so kind, liberal, tender, and affectionate, that it is impossible not to love them. They are dowered with so many sweet and pleasant virtues that our hearts are drawn out to them; and whether we will or not—indeed, without raising a question on the point—we feel bound to them at once, and for ever. So large-hearted, so open-handed a nature was that of the fair maiden who now comes out to the well. "A little water from thy pitcher," is the stranger's request; and her answer is, "Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink." When she had done this, she said, "I will draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking. And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw water, and drew for all his camels."

How rich and generous were her qualities! how large of heart! how open of hand! And how much depended on her reply! Little did the fair and gracious woman think of the great issues that were trembling in the balance, waiting for her answer. She might have said, as did another woman to another

Traveller who sat wearied on another well, in reply to the request, "Give me to drink," in the churlish words, "How is it that thou, a stranger from another country, askest drink of me, a daughter of the land?" A reception so rude, so uncourteous, might have ended at once, and for ever, the marriage treaty which was to place her name in that roll of honourable women from whom the promised Messiah was to spring. But showing only a bountiful spirit, and impatient to comply with the stranger's request, she hastened to minister to his wants. No wonder the man marvelled. In this remarkable providence he sees an answer to his prayer; and feeling that the Lord had made his journey prosperous, and that so far He had ordered his steps, and without pausing to inquire of what lineage she came, but perfectly satisfied, he presents the gifts which the usage of the time warranted. He "took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten shekels weight of gold; and said, Whose daughter art thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room in thy father's house for us to lodge in? And she said, I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor. She said moreover, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in." Overcome with so evident a proof of the Lord's marvellous guidance, the old man bows his head, and worships. "Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and truth: I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren." Struck

with his profound devotion, hearing him mention the name of Abraham, and hearing him also say that he has been "led to the house of his master's brethren," the maiden hastens home to communicate the strange intelligence, and to tell them of her mother's house these things. And mark how she goes not away empty. She carries back upon her person the rich gifts which she has received. These were love-tokens from the man who seeks her hand, and who would woo and win her as his bride.

"These things are an allegory." When the messenger of God goes out to win souls for his Master's Son, and when he finds some one willing to follow Jesus, he has authority not to send that soul empty away. He gives it, in the promises of God, tokens of the Divine favour, assurances of the Divine love, and makes over to it, on the warrant of God's Word, all the covenant blessings of grace, pardon, peace, and eternal life. I appeal as witnesses of this truth to all who have closed with the offers of the gospel. You are witnesses that the Lord gives many precious gifts to all who receive His Son on the word of His messengers; that "He blesses them with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ Jesus," and enriches them with "the unsearchable riches of Christ." Even at the outset of the Christian life, even in the reception of the overtures of Christ's love, it is found that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

When Laban, Rebekah's brother, hears her rapid story of the interview she has just had, he hastens

forth to bid the old man welcome. "It came to pass, when he saw the earring and the bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well."

I pause for a moment on the words, "when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands." In these love-tokens Laban beheld the evidence that her tale was true. He could not doubt when on fair cheek and rounded arm flashed the sparkling jewel, and was bound the burning gold. So when men see our faith, our hope, our love; when the fruits of the Spirit are manifested in our life, and we "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour" by a holy walk, they are compelled to believe that we have indeed been with Jesus. There is a rich chain of Christian graces which we may wear, and which will be an incontestable proof to all around that Christ is in us of a truth, and that "the love of Christ constraineth us to live not unto ourselves, but unto Him." There is an eloquence in living goodness which all can hear; there is a silent speech in an earnest, pure, and truthful life which the most ignorant can admire, and the simplest can understand. There is "the ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price." Laban's welcome to Abraham's servant is couched in the beautiful words, "Come in, thou blessed of the Lord: wherefore standest thou without? For I have prepared the house, and room for the camels." The man accepts the invitation, and

enters Laban's household; and straw and provender are provided for the camels, and water to wash his feet after his weary journey; and meat is set before him for the supply of his hunger. But the faithful messenger, true to his master's interests and his own oath, refuses to take any refreshment; he will neither wash nor eat until he has delivered his message, and received his answer. He tells his story with all plainness and simplicity, closing his tale in the words of the forty-ninth verse: "And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left." He has come from a family to which alone has been made known the knowledge of God, and in which exclusively the fear and worship of the Lord were to be found. And he comes to offer Laban and his household a share in the privileges of the chosen seed, setting before them all the blessings of the covenant, and inviting them to become partakers in those privileges, and to cast in their lot with the people whose God is the Lord. Will Laban believe the good news the messenger tells respecting the Divine covenant with Abraham, and the promise that in him "all the families of the earth are to be blessed"? Will he yield his sister at the messenger's demand, and permit her to go as the bride of Abraham's son? Will the maiden herself obey the call to leave all—kindred and home, and, walking by faith and not by sight, consent to be the bride of one whom she has never seen, that she may share in the blessings of Abraham's God? Laban and Bethuel,

the brother and father, moved by a powerful conviction that God is working in the matter, and acknowledging that the thing proceedeth from the Lord, give their frank consent. "Behold, Rebekah is before thee; take her, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken." The old man, on hearing these words, is overpowered in his spirit at the marvellous goodness of God, and bowing himself to the earth, he worships the Lord. Full, too, of delight at the success of his own embassy, he brings out many more rich and costly presents, "jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment," and gives them to the bride of his master's son, and also to her kindred. So "joy and gladness are found" in that household, "thanksgiving, and the voice of melody."

Thus, brethren, as we advance in the Christian life, Christ delights in giving ever richer and greater blessings to the soul that receives Him; an increase of faith and hope and love; fuller peace in communion with Him; deeper joys with a growth in grace; and a completer happiness in a clearer understanding of His will—and even they of the believer's kindred and household obtain a reflex blessing, if nothing more, for the voice of joy and health is in the tabernacle of the righteous; "and so long as the ark of the covenant was in the house of Obed-edom, the Lord blessed Obed-edom and all that he had."

I come into this assembly to seek a bride for my Master's Son. He invites thee, whosoever thou art to whom the message of His mercy comes, to accept a share in His great and gracious love. He invites

thee by His Word preached to thee, by His Spirit striving with thee, by His ambassador pleading with thee, by His providence waiting for thee, to become His. He gives thee complete proof of His love in the humiliation He stooped to for thee; in the sorrow He endured for thee; in the tears He shed for thee; in the cross He bore for thee; in the death He died for thee; and in the grave He entered for thee. These are more substantial proofs of His love than were the raiment, the jewels, and gems which Isaac sent to Rebekah. And, besides, has He not a claim on thee? are you not already His by right? Has He not redeemed thee, "not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot"? And He comes to thee, O favoured soul, through His messenger, not at a venture, but with a certainty; He knows thee by name. He has come out with the express purpose of finding thee. He has brought thee here in His providence to speak to thee, and reach thine ear, and through thine ear thine heart. I know thee not; I but draw the bow at a venture; but "the Lord, who knoweth them that are His," can fasten the arrow of conviction and of faith in your soul. Yield to His importunate suit at once. "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good." And to the question, "Wilt thou go with this Man?" let the ready answer be, "I will go."

The treaty of marriage being ratified, the servant of Abraham is impatient to return: "Send me away unto my master." Her brother and her mother are

naturally anxious for a little delay. They cannot part just yet with sister and daughter, and would fain have her linger a short time longer in her old home. "Let the damsel abide with us a few days, at the least ten; after that she shall go. And he said, Hinder me not, seeing that the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master. And they said, We will call the damsel, and inquire at her mouth. And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said [with the modesty of a maiden, and the firmness of a man], I will go." There is no delay, no hesitation; she weighs the desire to linger a few more days in her father's dwelling, and the loving reluctance of her family to part with her, against the solemn appeal of the holy man whose way the Lord hath prospered, that they should return to his master at once, now that his embassy is well ended; so to the question of her mother and her brother, "Wilt thou go with this man?" she at once gives the cordial assent, "I will go."

This woman presents us with a fair and beautiful pattern of faith. "Whom having not seen, she loves," and willingly leaves all to follow him. The length of the way, the journey across the desert, are not thought of. Would to God that the Spirit who moved Rebekah's heart to turn her back on the house of her childhood and the land of her birth, to become the bride of Isaac, would persuade sinners to accept a better offer, evidenced by tokens of a better love,—to give us, "as ambassadors for Christ," in His suit for

their hearts, the maiden's ready and prompt reply. "Wilt thou go with this Man?" "I will go."

I set forth to your acceptance the Lord Jesus Christ. "Behold the Man!" Oh that I could describe the glory and beauty, the majesty and mercy, that meet in Jesus! But the subject is beyond the tongues of men and angels. I can only say that He is "fairer than the children of men," "full of grace and truth." He is fragrant as "the rose of Sharon," fair as "the lily of the valley," more precious than "the gold of Ophir." To quote the language of an old and holy song, "He is the chiefest among ten thousand," and, what none other of the sons of men is, "altogether lovely." "Wilt thou go with this Man?" "Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord; and worship thou Him." Oh, "hearken, and incline thine ear" to that gracious invitation of the Lord thy God, as He puts to thee the question, "Wilt thou go with this Man?" and let the prompt, decisive reply be this: "I will go."

But I must hasten to a close. It is a calm and tranquil evening in the fair summer-time. Rosy clouds gather round the setting sun. Not a breath of wind disturbs the perfect repose, or stirs a leaf upon the tree. The birds are silent in the boughs. The sheep are at rest in the fold. Man ceases from the labour of the day. Isaac paces the fragrant fields, and as his soul is subdued unto the sweet harmony of the hour, he meditates on the Divine works and ways,

and praying, he is rapt in holy fellowship with his father's God. Suddenly he lifts his eyes, and sees the aged servant of the house, with his band of servants and laden camels, drawing near. Here is the answer to his father's prayer. A second time in his life does he prove the truth of the blessed promise, "Jehovah-Jireh: the Lord will provide." Rebekah, letting down her veil, lights off her camel, and the two hearts—the faith that sought, and the faith that found—meet on that calm Eastern night beneath the Syrian stars, and the two are one for ever in the Lord.

In the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah standing on a cordial assent, we have a type of the union between the believing soul and Christ. Christ takes that soul, and lavishes upon it His love, and binds it to His heart for ever. And He makes over to it all that He has. "All Mine is thine," He says. Nothing is withheld. He gives it a share in His crown, a place in His throne; the fruit of the tree of life which grows in the midst of the Paradise of God; the water from the river of life which flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb; the new name, written on the white stone; the white robe; the green palm and the golden harp of God.

"Wilt thou go with this Man?" Wilt thou go? "I will go." But let there be no "halting between two opinions;" no doubt, delay, or hesitation—not even for ten days; no, not for a day, or an hour. "Behold, now is the accepted time, and now is the day of salvation." Wilt thou go? Wilt thou leave all for Him? All? you ask—"must it be all?" Yes.

He will not accept a divided heart. What husband would? What bridegroom at the marriage-altar would consent to wed a bride whose heart was not all his own? Christ is jealous over you with a godly jealousy. "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me."

"Wilt thou go with this Man?" If every one of you begin to make excuse yet to that question, "Wilt thou go with this Man?" yea, even though I were to go alone, I would answer, "I will go." But you—*you* will not refuse. Moved by the Holy Spirit, "drawn with the cords of love, and the bands of a man," to the question, "Wilt thou go with this Man?" you will make the prompt reply, springing from an honest heart and true, "I will go."

"O let my heart no further roam!
'Tis Thine by vows and hopes and fears
Long since—O call Thy wanderer home;
To that dear home, safe in Thy wounded side,
Where only broken hearts their sin and shame may hide."

Ruth.

"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."—RUTH i. 16, 17.

THERE is something as simple as romantic in the sweet, peaceful, primitive pastoral story of this book.

The terrible scourge of famine had driven Naomi and her husband, with their two sons, from Bethlehem-Judah to the land of Moab, in search of bread; and there they made their home. Naomi is soon left a widow, and her sons marry wives of the daughters of Moab—Orpah, the name of one; Ruth, the name of the other. Ten happy years pass, when death again enters the household; and now three widows mourn and mingle their tears together. Husband and sons taken from her, Naomi turns in her sorrow from Moab to the people and country of her birth. Hearing that God had shown mercy to them in abating the famine, and in giving them bread, she resolves to revisit Bethlehem-Judah. Her daughters-in-law are unwill-

ing that she should go alone. They also will leave the land of Moab: will part from country and kin; and though the place has been endeared to them by the graves of their dead, will share the fortunes of their mother-in-law.

But Naomi is reluctant that they should make so great a sacrifice for her. Aged and poor, bowed with grief, burdened with years, it is not in her power to make any recompense for affection so true. And so she said unto her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house; the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept." But they would not be persuaded to leave her. "Surely we will return with thee unto thy people." Again they cling to her, weeping. But Orpah is at length persuaded, and turns her face to the land of her fathers. Not so Ruth. Though Naomi urges her to go back, and points to the figure of the departing Orpah, yet is she steadfast. It wrings her heart to part from her sister, her house, her country; but it would break it to part from Naomi. She cannot do it; and so, throwing herself into Naomi's arms, and with a passionate burst of weeping, she bursts into the pathetic words, "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, I will die, and there

will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me."

There is much in these words, if we regard them by way of spiritual application, as teaching us, by all that Ruth was to Naomi, what we should be to Christ.

Look at Orpah and Ruth. Both the women rise up to attend Naomi as she leaves the land of the stranger for her native home in Bethlehem-Judah. In this they are alike, the resolution they make is the same; and, leaving kindred and country, they resolve to accompany their mother-in-law to her own land. But after a time Orpah's courage fails. She listens to the entreaties of Naomi, seconded, as no doubt they were, by the whisperings of her own heart; and turning away, retraces her steps to the purple hills of Moab. She loved Naomi, but not so well as home, kindred, and her old gods; not with that passionate love which is "stronger than death, and which many waters cannot quench." Reminding us of him who turned his back on Jesus, and "went away sorrowful because he had great possessions," Orpah leaves Naomi and her sister to pursue their way to Bethlehem, and goes back to the land of Moab.

Not so Ruth. This is the crisis of her history: the hour and moment of her destiny. Had she "halted between two opinions," had she lingered, or cast a longing look behind; above all, had she turned back to the godless land of Moab, who can say what her fate would have been, or what blessings—the blessings of God's chosen people—she would have

lost for ever? Had she failed in this crisis, her name would never have been found in the catalogue of the mothers from whom Jesus sprang. Moved, no doubt, by the Spirit of God, she resists all Naomi's entreaties to leave her; and with a resolution which cannot be shaken, declares that henceforth their path through the world shall be one; that death only shall part them; nay, not death itself, for when she dies she shall be laid in Naomi's grave—"where thou diest, I will die, and there will I be buried."

In these two women see a picture of the undecided soul and the decided Christian. There are some who are willing to go a certain length in religion; who give up many things, and do many things; but are not ready to renounce everything for Christ—"to count all things but loss and dross that so they may win Christ, and be found in Him." Whilst it is true that we can give nothing for salvation, it is equally true that there is a vast deal which we must give up for salvation. And many, alas! are unwilling to make the sacrifice; and so, when some decisive moment in their life comes, and they are called to decide between God and Mammon, between the world and Christ, they shrink from the necessity of renouncing all that is dear to their hearts; and rejecting the good, they choose the evil, and cling to the world.

Christ is calling us to His service; inviting us to enlist under the banner of His cross; is saying to every one amongst us, "Son, daughter, give Me thine heart." What reply will you make? Are you ready

to serve Him up to a certain point, to go a certain part of the way; and are you shrinking from entire dedication to His will, complete consecration to His service?

Beware of resting content with half-measures. They cannot satisfy your conscience, nor can they be pleasing to God. Still are the old words true, "He that is not with Me is against Me, and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth."

Let there be no hesitation, no wavering; but turning to your Saviour with all your hearts, let this be your resolve, "Whither Thou goest, I will go."

"Whither thou goest, I will go." "Lead on, Lord," is the believer's cry; "and I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest! It may be to irksome, difficult, or uncongenial duties; it may be to honour or dishonour; to good report or evil report; to temptation such as Thine in the wilderness; to sorrow like Thine in the garden!" Brethren, beloved in the Lord, can we indeed say this? If we can, it is not nature speaking through us, but grace, even the grace of God, which, triumphing over the unwillingness of the natural heart, enables us to "do all things through Christ that strengtheneth us." Nothing less than strength from above can nerve us to "follow Jesus without the camp, bearing His reproach;" to forsake all that we hold dear; to run counter to all that is congenial to our natural inclination. But for all who are thus made "willing in the day of His power," for all such whole-hearted disciples of Christ, there is reserved "a great recompense of reward." For the Master Him-

self says, "If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; for where I am, there shall also My servant be." And when the apostle saw a splendid vision of the glorified in heaven, and heard them harping upon their harps, and singing a new song, he was told that these blessed ones were they who "follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth."

"Where thou lodgest, I will lodge." The house that Christ deigns to visit and bless with His presence, there will I delight to be a guest. I care not for the homes of the rich, the great, and the courted, if He is not received and welcomed there, if His Name is not honoured—His love is unknown. What is their wealth and splendour to me? what their pleasures and mirth, the gay dance, and the joyous song? "The tabret and the harp and the viol may be in their feasts;" but if they regard not the work of the Lord, and if they forget Him, "O my soul, come not thou into their secret: unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united." "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

On the other hand, although the house be poor—the dwelling of the humble—yet if Thou, my Lord, who art "no respecter of persons," and who didst honour, when on earth, the lowly homes of Nazareth and Bethany, if Thou be there, there would I be too. "The blessing of the Lord maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it." While the ark of God remained with the family of Obed-edom, "the Lord blessed the house of Obed-edom and all that he had." So

now "the blessing of the Lord is in the house of the righteous," and "a little that the righteous hath is better than the treasures of many wicked." Who would not rather have been an inmate in the humble home where dwelt Martha and Mary and Lazarus, and which Christ, after many a long and weary day, blessed by His presence, than have been a guest in the luxurious palace of Herod, the magnificent court of Pilate, the splendid mansion of the high priest? And if Jesus turned that retired house at Bethany into a heaven on earth, and if angels must often have hovered over its doors while their Lord was entertained within, and Mary was seated at His feet, must not as rich a blessing rest on that Christian home, no matter how poor or how humble it may be, where Christ is honoured, and Christ condescends to dwell? As we think that the heavenly presence is in every house, no matter what its outward appearance or condition may be, which is filled with the love of Christ, shall we not say, not only, "where Thou goest, I will go," but "where Thou lodgest, I will lodge"?

"Thy people shall be my people." What a test of true religion is here! "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." Can you stand this test? Let me ask you who the persons are in whose society you find most pleasure? What is their character? What the aim of their life? And what will be their end? In the great day of separation, when the sheep shall be separated from the goats, and the one shall be placed on the right

hand of the Judge, and the other on the left, where shall they appear? In those hours of our life when we can go where we will, when we select what company we like, what society do we seek?—in whose presence do we find our pleasure? Do we prefer the companionship of those who love God to that of the most intellectual and the most brilliant society on earth? With all their imperfections, failures, and shortcomings, and what may appear to you their strict views and narrow spirit, do you still recognize in them so much of the mind of Christ that, to use the words of Scripture, you "make much of them that fear the Lord"? Apply this one test of conversion to yourselves. Can you say, "God's people shall be my people"?

"And thy God my God."

This crowns all. To choose God as "the Strength of our heart and our Portion for ever." To say with David, "I will love Thee, O Lord my Strength," to stay the mind on Him as One who alone can fill and satisfy our souls, is the very secret of all true religion. To turn from sin to God, from self to God, from the world to God, from man to God, and to lay ourselves a willing offering at His feet with the words, "Other lords beside Thee have had dominion over us, but by Thee only will we make mention of Thy Name"—this is salvation. And a blessed thing it is to make this full surrender of ourselves to God, for in God all wants are supplied. He is the Divine and unfathomable Fountain of all grace and of all goodness. "All our fresh springs are in Him." "Of His fulness

all we receive, and grace for grace." "Happy is the people that is in such a case; yea, happy is the people that have the Lord for their God."

"Where thou diest, I will die." Here I confess the text fails us. "Die?" Jesus can never die. "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hades and of death." Die? "He dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him: for in that He died, He died unto sin once; and in that He liveth, He liveth unto God." He lives; and because He lives, we shall live also. In one sense, indeed, we die with Him; we die on the cross to sin in its guilt and power. "We are dead, and our life is hid with Christ in God." But in another sense there is no death for a believer. "If a man keep My saying, he shall never taste of death." There is nothing for him worthy the name of death. I believe the truth of the beautiful words, "In the way of righteousness is life, and in the pathway thereof there is no death." Death for a true Christian is but a transition to a fuller life; a birth to a higher and nobler state; a baptism from the Church militant into the Church triumphant; a shadowy valley leading to "the light of everlasting day." Jesus came "that we might have life, and that we might have it more abundantly;" and as we stand in the light of Christ's victory over the grave, we see that the death of the mortal is the life of the immortal—that the death of the corruptible is the resurrection of the incorruptible. We can, therefore, comfort one another

with these words ; and, looking on death as a thing virtually abolished for all who believe, we are able to reckon that "Christ died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep," whether we wake on earth, or sleep in the grave, or wake again in heaven, "we should live together with Him."

"There will I be buried." Thy grave is empty, O Christ! Thou hast spoiled the spoiler, and vanquished the victor. Not the tomb holds Thee now, but heaven ; and, seated on the Father's throne, Thou art "King of kings, and Lord of lords!" If I am buried with Thee, "it shall be by baptism unto death, that I may rise with Thee into newness of life." Yes, I would bury the old man—I would have it dead, crucified, slain, nailed to the cross where Jesus poured forth His soul unto death—and "the life which I live in the flesh I would live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

But once more the last words of Ruth are not applicable to a believer in Christ: "The Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." Death cannot part us from Christ. Nay, death unites us more consciously to Him. "So long as we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord ; but when we are absent from the body, then we are present with the Lord."

I look on death as the gate of life to a good and holy man—the portal to glory, the vestibule to heaven. I like to regard it as the end of sin, and pain, and fear, and care. In the sufferings of the

sick-room I behold the last struggle of the battle that precedes the victory; in the pangs of the weary ones, with the death-sweat on their faces, I see the last swell of the storm that carries them into the haven where we would be; and in Death himself I fear no king of terrors, crowned and armed with threatening dart, for the crown has been taken from his brow, and the dart wrested from his hand. I only welcome the messenger who is sent to conduct the victorious warrior into the presence of Him, "whom having not seen, we love; in whom, though now we see Him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of joy."

Would to God that, impressed with the blessings that follow upon the choice of Christ as the portion for the soul, you might accept Him as "all your salvation and all your desire"!

Think how Ruth was a gainer from her resolution to leave the land of Moab, and to cast in her lot with the chosen people of God. Gleaning amidst the alien corn, the beautiful stranger attracts the attention of her kinsman Boaz, and they are married. Thus Ruth became the great-grandmother of David, and the ancestress of a greater than David, even of the Messiah, who drew His first breath in the very city where Ruth and Boaz made their home. In Bethlehem the Saviour of the world was born. In the very fields trodden by the reapers' feet, and where Ruth gleaned, shepherds watched their flocks in the solemn night; and here the glory of the Lord shone forth, and the purple skies, where flamed the stranger star, were

filled with an angel-host, who sang of "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." So was the old saying verified, "Them that honour Me I will honour." God, who "setteth the solitary in families," took the widowed Ruth, a lonely wanderer from the land of Moab, and gave her husband and child, and placed her name in the honourable roll of women from whom the incarnate Saviour sprang. There are but four women mentioned from Eve to Mary in our Lord's genealogy, and Ruth is one of the four. So no one ever serves God in vain. "There is no one that leaves father and mother, and houses and lands, for His sake, that shall not receive in this life a hundredfold more," it may be along with some sorrow and trial, "and in the world to come life everlasting." Well may we say, "Blessed is the man (or woman) whom Thou choosest, and causest to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts: he shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple."

Would that all moved by Divine grace might cast in their lot with the people of God! Christ is calling you to a decision; He does not urge and implore you as Naomi urged and implored Ruth to "go back to her people and her gods." No! Blessed Saviour! He says, "Come, come unto Me, and I will give you rest." Who is there here that will refuse? Is some Orpah, over whom the world and her idols have a strong hold, preparing to depart? Oh, "see that ye refuse not Him that speaketh from heaven." Turning away from the evil, cast yourselves at your Saviour's

feet, and say to Jesus, from a heart molten in the fires of Divine love, "Lead on, Lord; I follow Thee. Where Thou goest, I will go; where Thou lodgest, I will lodge; Thy people shall be my people, and Thy God my God."

The Testing Fire.

"For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."—1 Cor. iii. 11–15.

The Church of Corinth had split itself up into religious parties, using as their watchwords the names of certain apostles and teachers by whom God had taught and wrought amongst them. Taking, in some cases, the holy Name of Christ Himself, they had rent to pieces the seamless coat, and cut into minutest sections the one body. One said, "I am of Paul," and another said, "I am of Apollos," and another, "I am of Christ." All were equally wrong—the Pauline party, the followers of Apollos, and those who called themselves Christ's. For however plausible it might sound to say, "We will take Christ only for our Teacher, and not His apostles or Church authority," they virtually said of others, "You are not Christ's; He belongs to us alone. We claim Him exclusively

as our Head." Just as when a man in the present day calls himself a "Bible Christian," he implies that others who differ from him are not "Bible Christians." St. Paul rebukes, in the sharpest way, this spirit of schism, and declares that it proved the Corinthians to be still "carnal," and, with all their vaunted gifts and boasted knowledge, to be only "babes in Christ." "For whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?" He then declares the true nature of Christian unity as opposed to schism. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" We are not the heads of parties, but the servants of Christ; not rivals, but co-workers. "He that planteth and he that watereth are one." "We are labourers together with God." All have the same end in view. Paul teaches you the freedom that is in Christ; Apollos animates you by his eloquence; Cephas fires you by his courage; but all are under the most solemn obligations to remember that they are "labourers together with God." The apostle now impresses on them the importance of fidelity in this work by means of a figure addressed to the imagination, but adapted to penetrate through that to the reason, as well as to touch the conscience. He likens the Church of God to a "building." He speaks of having, as "a wise master-builder," "laid the foundation;" and he represents other ministers of the gospel as building upon it the living stones. He tells us that these builders do their work differently. Some build on

the foundation the most costly material, "gold," adding to it men in whom there is nothing of base alloy—true to the very core; not gilt, but gold. Some build with "silver," placing on it men loyal and good and pure, if not of the highest worth. Others build with "precious stones," men in whom Christian graces are so apparent, and in whom Christian gifts are so rich, that they shine as jewels in the Saviour's crown.

Again, there are ministers who are content to lay on the one foundation the poorest and the most worthless materials. "Wood." Wood, we know, decays, and is gnawed by the worm. "Hay." Hay, we know, moulders or rots. "Stubble." Stubble perishes, or may be consumed. And the apostle warns every minister, every official builder of the spiritual temple, to "take heed how he buildeth," that is, what sort of professing Christians he builds up. And he grounds this warning on the fact that "every man's work is one day to be made manifest: for the day shall declare it;" that it shall be "tried," or tested by "fire," and the fire shall bring out and show, with respect to every man's work, "of what sort it is." Then each builder shall have an appropriate meed of praise or blame. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

I understand "the gold and silver and precious stones"—"the wood, the hay, the stubble"—to represent, respectively, true or hollow professors, nominally

united by the preaching of the gospel to the visible Church. For the figure of a "building" is retained throughout. The foundation of the building is a Person, even Jesus Christ. "Other foundation can no man lay." The superstructure consists of *persons*. "Ye are God's building."

Before proceeding to general and broader principles, let us look at the text in this, its primary application. It is the office of ministers to edify "the body of Christ," to build up that grand, spiritual temple, formed of living stones, which is rising, day by day, upon earth, and which, when the ages have run out, shall be filled with the glory of God. "The Foundation-stone" of that temple is laid once for all—it is Christ Himself—and the Christian teacher, not thinking of disturbing that, or of displacing that, proceeds to build upon it. I assume him to be a man of genuine faith. His own trust is in the Saviour. His own heart is substantially right with God. He builds into the edifice "gold and silver and precious stones"—materials valuable and beautiful; congenial to the properties of the foundation and to the nature of the temple, which is to grow into a "habitation" of God through the Spirit. Or, to leave the figure for a moment, he does real work in the conversion of souls; he moves the heart, awakens the conscience, turns the sinner from the error of his ways, and does much to perfect his Christian character. He proves himself "a wise master-builder." Now look at the other side of the case. Though the minister build "on the one Foundation," and be a man of personal

piety, he builds with "wood and hay and stubble"—the most worthless and least durable materials—as if these were fit to compose a Divine temple, sanctified by the Divine presence! He "heals the hurts" of the souls committed to his charge, slightly, not showing them, along with the doctrines of grace, the need of deep penitence, and the necessity for humility, or the duty of coming out and being separate from their old sins. He does shallow work.

There is a style of preaching, very common, dealing with evangelical shibboleths, and—may I say?—full of stock phrases, which, while it seems to honour Christ by reiterating His Name, and calling on men to "come to Jesus," is wanting in depth and in that exhibition of the whole character of God which leads the sinner to "abhor himself, and repent in dust and ashes." It ministers to emotionalism and the love of excitement, but passes lightly over the dealings of God's Spirit in conviction of sin, and over the sorrow, the pain, the moral agony and shame and self-reproach that bow us to the dust when the Holy Ghost unveils the fulness and freeness of the love of God, and the darkness of our own selfish rebellion against Him. It leaves men's hearts untouched, and their lives unchanged. It leads to disappointment and regret. We preachers must beware of surface-work. We must cast men down before we build them up; we must lead them by that *via dolorosa*—the way of penitence to the cross. If we do not show the necessity of conversion; if we cry, "Peace, peace," when there is no peace; if we "daub the wall with

untempered mortar;" if we do not grapple faithfully with the evil of sin;—we are not true to our commission, nor are we "fellow-labourers with God." It is a fatal thing to lead our hearers to think they are saved and safe because their feelings have been touched, and certain emotions have been aroused. There may be a measure of excitement, and the Word may seem to be received with joy, even where there is no reality, and life is absent, and there is nothing of that fiery baptism which conquers, melts, and purifies, and sets the soul aflame with love. Of this kind of superficial ministerial work it may be said, "whose end is to be burned." Year after year the preacher goes on building; and he builds with some diligence and some complacency. He thinks that he is doing real work for God, and erecting what will endure both for the Master's use and his own honour. Others may think so too. But "a day" is coming which will not only test the nature of every man's work, but detect and make manifest the sort of materials that have been added to the building. Oh that day—the day of God! The great day—the day of the Lord! The day when the Master shall come to take account of His servants! In that day "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is," and woe to the builder if it wither up and shrivel in the flame! "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward." If the souls which he has taught, and treated as saved, shall abide the fiery ordeal; if they are in Christ, and Christ in them; if they be those of whom

the Lord speaks: "They shall be Mine in that day when I make up My jewels;"—then "he shall receive a reward." He shall have a reward in himself, in the blessed consciousness that fills his soul that "his labour in the Lord has not been in vain;" that he has furthered the redeeming work of the Lord, and has helped to fill "the many mansions of heaven." He shall have a reward from his Master, in His expressed approval, and in the words that welcome him to heaven—"Well done, good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Anticipating this great recompense for his toil, St. Paul says to his Thessalonian converts, "What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

But turn to the reverse of this picture. The minister has done his work so superficially that, although "building" on the true "foundation," he has only built into the edifice "wood, hay, stubble." "The day has made this manifest;" the fire has tried it, "and it is consumed, perishing in the searching flame." "The builder suffers loss." The labour of a life is gone; his work is destroyed; not a soul saved by his ministry! Not one life built up into an "abiding" part of the eternal temple! Awful thought! Not one thing done in those many and apparently busy years of ministerial life which can abide the trial by fire, or survive the awful day of the manifestation of the sons of God! All is "loss." His ministerial life is proved to have been barren;

nay, he is in danger of perishing along with his work The flame almost seizes him; he escapes through the conflagration just with his life and any personal Christian graces he may have; but with no "fruit of his labours." He is like one rescued from a burning house — everything destroyed; his very raiment scorched and singed, and he himself terrified and alarmed—alive, but nothing more. "He has suffered loss," the loss of all his work; but he himself—and this is cause for thankfulness—he himself, because he was on the true Foundation—a believer—is "saved" —saved, "yet so as by fire."

Let us look at the text as containing a general principle applicable to every believer. There is a Foundation laid. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Our religious life begins by accepting Christ as a personal Redeemer, by trusting for pardon, peace, and eternal life to the work He finished on the cross. I assume that you are personally acquainted with Christ; that you have "obtained precious faith," and are "washed, sanctified, and justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." But is this all? Is faith enough? "No," says the apostle, "it is not enough." "Believe, and go on to something more." You have to "build up yourselves on your most holy faith; praying in the Holy Ghost; keeping yourselves in the love of God; and looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." Only by building yourselves up in personal character, day by day, act by act; only by true labour and by

gradual progress, can the spiritual temple grow. You have work to do which no one can do for you, which must be done by yourselves, which ministers can only teach you how to do. Every one of you must be the real formers of your own character. Let each man, therefore, "take heed how he buildeth." See that you are building with what is solid and durable—with "gold and silver and precious stones"—not with that which is perishable and worthless—"wood, hay, and stubble." Seek to build into your character and into your lives truth, and goodness, and strength, and purity, and love.

The Apostle Peter tells us how we may build into our lives "gold and silver and precious stones." "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity." Such work "abides;" such growth in holiness, such progress in the Divine life, will stand the testing fires of the judgment-day, and the Master will delight to recognize and honour these graces in His people. They who have so built shall be more than saved. "Having given all diligence to make your calling and election sure," you shall have "an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Heaven is not a place where all shall be on a dead level of equality. Though all enter there by grace, there is a reward according to works. There are degrees of glory. They that are "steadfast, immovable, always

abounding in the work of the Lord," shall be "more than conquerors." Theirs a front rank among the redeemed, theirs a brighter crown and a richer sceptre, and a higher recompense of reward. Oh, joy beyond all joy! They shall be given a chief place in their Father's kingdom, and, amidst the congratulations of angels and the hallelujahs of heaven, they shall march as conquerors to a throne, gladness and greeting on every hand, themselves examples of the blessed promise, "If any man's work abide, he shall receive a reward."

But there is another mode of building, and another issue to a life's labour. A man, for instance, comes to Christ; he casts away every other hope. "He builds on the one Foundation." All true; but what does he put into the temple? "Wood, hay, stubble." He may waste his time on objects that do not profit, on acts of will-worship, in a voluntary humility, and neglecting of the body in ritual niceties and uncalled-for austerities, and find at last, that though saved, and admitted to the kingdom, he has suffered himself to be "beguiled of his reward." Another may have low views of holiness, superficial views of sin; worldly habits have not been renounced, evil tempers have not been controlled, the tongue has not been bridled and tamed. What poor weak, worthless structures you see many who "profess and call themselves Christians" building! What inconsistency in their lives! What indolence—talents hidden in a napkin or buried in the earth! What love of money, which love is the root of all evil! What slavery to fashion!

What ambition! What conformity to the world! What keenness in business, pursued to the very borders where honesty and dishonesty separate! What deadness to the cause of God! What strifes and bitterness! What indifference to the salvation of souls! No work undertaken directly for God; no word ever spoken for Christ in a sinner's ear! A life very like that which irreligious men are leading; at least, with little difference that a human observer can see. And yet the builders may be resting on Christ. With all their ignorance, carelessness, and lowness of standard, with all their earthly life, they may be Christians—very inconsistent ones, yet still, in a true sense, Christians. But what is the end of such a Christian's course? "His work shall be burned;" "he shall suffer loss," but he himself shall be saved. "*Yet so as by fire.*" The flames of the last conflagration will burn up the carnal materials which have been worked into his life. All will be destroyed. And well they should be. If they are worthless and poor, spotted by the flesh, soiled and stained by selfishness, who would wish to carry them with him to heaven? But the destruction of his likings and his labours is a sad end to a selfish and inconsistent life. It is a sad end to all those precious years in which he might have been "laying up treasures for himself in heaven." Oh, beware of piling up fuel for the fires of the last day; for, if you do, you shall "suffer loss." "You shall be ashamed before Christ at His coming." You shall "walk naked, and men shall see your shame." "Another shall take your

crown." You shall be "beguiled of your reward." You shall just escape, and nothing more. "*Saved, yet so as by fire.*" Think of this; think of it in time. Begin to build now with true Christian principles, true Christian work. The fires of judgment cannot consume one jot or tittle of anything that is truly Christian, of faith, or love, or loyalty to Christ. "Gold, silver, or precious stones" will pass through any fire—will shine out the more clearly after they have come out of the furnace, and shall be built into that fair structure which is "incorruptible, undefiled, and which will never fade away."

A word more. "If the righteous scarcely shall be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" Lot was "scarcely saved." All his wealth lost, his flocks, his herds, his substance gone; the man burnt out of Sodom. Himself saved—saved, "yet so as by fire."

Now I ask—I lay the question on your consciences—if even some of those who build on Christ are scarcely saved after all, what shall become of those who are not so building at all? If it be alarming to be "almost saved," what must it be to be altogether lost? If for a man to "suffer loss" conveys a thrill of anguish to the mind, what agony in the thought that a man is lost himself, and is a castaway! Judgment must begin at the house of God, and if it first begins at us, what must be the end of them that obey not the gospel of Christ? It will be beyond imagination awful to be "saved so as by fire," all our works which we deemed so good, and worthy of

praise, destroyed, to be just "plucked as a brand from the burning;" nothing left to us of all our sore labour under the sun, no works following us to heaven! But it will be more awful still to be consigned to the scorching flames, to be consumed by remorse; to be exposed to the Divine indignation against sin; to be subject to the fever of a regret which no tears can quench, no anguish can subdue. I pray you, who are living for this world, to think of this. The day is coming—the day of God—"the day which shall burn like an oven, when the wicked shall be as tow, and the sinner as a spark, and they shall both burn together, and none shall quench them." The day is coming when the fire shall "try every man's work of what sort it is." Have you "fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before you in the gospel"? Or, having fled, and having accepted the one Foundation, is your work "gold," and "silver," and "precious stones,"—things imperishable, which shall gleam and flash in the light; or "wood," "hay," "stubble,"—things perishable, which shall be only fuel for the flame and perish in the blaze? *Choose which?* Or, shall you perish yourselves?

May the declaring "day" and the testing fire prove that we have not only rested "on the one Foundation," but that all our works have been of the nature of "gold," "silver," and "precious stones;" and so may it be found that they were all wrought in God.

Wood, Hay, and Stubble.

"If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."—1 Cor. iii. 15.

These words have somehow or other burnt themselves into my mind. They come back again and again, and every time with a new meaning and fresh application. I hope you will not be wearied by a return to a subject at once so solemn and so practical, and one which bears so essentially on our present Christian life on earth, and, through this, on our future life in heaven. If any apology is needed for recurring to this truth of "salvation by fire," as contrasted with "an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," I make it in the words of St. Paul to the Philippians: "To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe." And I find also a justification in the example of St. Peter, who says, "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in

this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance."

The apostle, you will remember, calls the Church "God's building." He speaks of having, "as a wise master-builder," laid the foundation. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." He brings before us the ministers of the Church as "builders" who build on that "Foundation." He reminds us that while they are alike faithful, and true men, they may do their work differently—one building with "gold, silver, and precious stones,"—raising up true Christians on the Foundation; and another building with "wood, hay, stubble,"—adding to the Foundation those who are Christians in name only. He with all solemnity warns every minister to "take heed how he builds;" and he grounds his warning on the fact that every man's work is one day to be "tried" or "tested" by fire; that the fire shall bring out and show, with respect to every man's work, "of what sort it is;" and that then each shall suffer corresponding loss, or receive a corresponding reward. "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

This is the primary thought of the text. There underlies it, however, a general principle which is applicable to each individual believer. Every Christian is himself "a builder." He has to build on "the one Foundation" all that is holy in personal character. The Christian life is built up, and per-

fected by sore labour, and slow degrees. "Let every man, therefore, take heed how he buildeth,"—with what materials: what are the aims and purposes, the motives and ends, which influence the soul, and go to form the character. Are they solid and durable, or perishable and worthless? One Christian, "walking worthy of the high vocation," builds with gold, and silver, and precious stones," with the bright and holy graces of a heavenly conversation; another Christian, taking but a low standard, careless of his high calling, inconsistent, "minding earthly things," builds with the "wood and hay, the straw and stubble," of an inconsistent life. And what is the result? The work of the one builder abides the revealing day and the testing fire, and gleams and flashes in its light. Therefore, "he shall have a reward," he shall have "an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." The work of the other is burned. It writhes for a moment in the blaze, and perishes; and the workman suffers loss—the loss of the labour of a whole life; "but he himself," because he is on the Foundation, "he himself is saved;" yet just plucked as a brand from the burning—"saved, yet so as by fire."

In dealing with these words, I leave the patent thoughts that underlie them, and turn to truths not so evident, but which may certainly be drawn from the passage.

And, first, the subject teaches us to look with tolerant charity on many who differ from ourselves.

"If any man build on the Foundation wood, hay, stubble, his work shall be burnt, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

There may be true faith in Christ, though there be mixed with it much ignorance concerning His work, and with regard to the great doctrine of grace. Let us never forget that true piety, though not consistent with indifference, and totally opposed to evil, may exist where there is a measure of intellectual error. A man may have but a dim and clouded apprehension of the relation of the atonement to the holy character of God; he may only know—best of all knowledge—that he is a sinner, and that Christ is a Saviour, and yet may cling to Him with a loving trust. Do not mistake me, or imagine that I undervalue the worth of a clear apprehension of scriptural doctrine, for this alone can lead to a vigorous and healthy faith, and withstand the shock of temptation and doubt; but, notwithstanding, faith may be very real, even though our intellectual grasp of truth be far from perfect, for the value of faith is not to be measured by the clearness of its vision. It may be defective, and yet true. The woman who touched the hem of the Saviour's garment, thinking that the material contact of her hand with His robe would heal her disease, had very low and superstitious views of Christ's person and work. But because she had an earnest desire for healing, and had confidence in our Lord's healing power, her faith had its reward, though there was mixed with it the "wood, hay, and stubble"

of an ignorant and unworthy conception of our Lord's healing power. Let us not hastily prejudge a matter so subtle and delicate, and determine how little or how much ignorance may exist with a real trust in Christ as a Saviour. But if I may bring these thoughts home to ourselves, I would say this—that confessing with all our knowledge we are but ignorant at the best, and feeling that there is much that we only "see through a glass, darkly," and that very wide are the differences between us and others who "profess and call themselves Christians," we should thank God that, in spite of much which we believe to be erroneous in certain religious systems, there may be true souls and loving hearts belonging to them all. Notwithstanding errors of the head, if men receive Christ as God's only Son and man's only Saviour, if above all things they see Him to be the one Sacrifice for sin, and come to Him for the pardon and cleansing which they need and desire, may we not cherish the hope that, in spite of many errors, they shall be finally saved? Yes; but because they have been putting into the structure of their creed and life these errors of doctrine or practice—building on the Foundation "the wood, the hay, the stubble," where only the "gold, and the silver, and the precious stones" should have been placed—they have, to their peril, piled up fuel for the last awful fires.

"Their work shall be burned;" "they shall suffer loss: but they themselves shall be saved; yet so as by fire." This is applicable to members of the Romish Church, and indeed is applicable to those members of

all Churches who attach an extravagant importance to the ritual and externals of religion, elevating the non-essential into the place of the essential, who give to the scaffolding the honour due to the building. Theirs is a system which, if I may so speak, substitutes the fringes of the robe, and the touch of the hand, for Christ Himself, and the clear action of a vigorous faith. With such a system I have no shadow of sympathy. Religion does not consist in acts external to the soul; but in "faith, working by love," and setting the heart aglow with a Divine flame. "In Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature." What are they building into their lives who are brought into bondage to frivolous observances: doing penance, counting beads, abstaining from meats, observing days, and binding themselves by vows? Are they not gathering together "the wood, the hay, and the stubble; wasting their labour on profitless objects, though all the while they fancy they are "laying up treasure in heaven, and doing work which shall abide"? "Why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (touch not; taste not; handle not; which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men? which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body, not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh." But while we regard this diligence and solicitude about matters kindred to those so strongly condemned by the apostle as wasted or worse, let us remember that

along with "the strange fire" of a mistaken devotion, there may be a devout trust in Christ as the one Mediator between God and man. May we not hope that some who clasp the crucifix may glory in nothing but the cross? May not some loving hearts discern, through the "dim religious light" of an erring Church, upon the so-called altar the one Sacrifice for sin? But still, because of the errors received for truths, and superstitious practices mistaken for duty, they are "beguiled of their reward." The fires of the revealing day will consume the worthless structure, and reduce to ashes the labours and sacrifices of a whole life! Nothing shall remain! It was only "wood, and hay, and stubble." Nothing solid or enduring. "Their work shall be burned; they shall suffer loss; but they themselves," because on the Foundation, "shall be aved;" "saved, yet so as by fire."

There is another application still of these words. We all know, too well, how many there are who, calling themselves Christ's, yet do not do honour to a Christian profession, do not "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." They are forgetful of their "high calling;" satisfied with a walk which falls short of the "holiness" after which we are commanded to "follow." They do not walk in love, nor "keep themselves unspotted from the world." They do not control their tempers, nor abound in those "fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God." Full of inconsistencies and imperfections, selfishness, irritability, pride, they neither spend for Christ, nor are spent in His service;

do not trade with their talents, or even put them out to interest; and are building on the Foundation no lasting and beautiful structure of Christian graces, —nothing but "wood, and hay, and stubble." Can such men be Christians at all? you ask in wonder. It is possible; for notwithstanding so much that is worthless about them, they may have "fled for refuge to the hope set before them in the gospel," trusting in the mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.' But how are they to go to heaven as they are? Can they carry with them that inborn vesture of imperfection, that carnal fleshly nature, those worldly habits, which they build up into the structure of their lives? Impossible. "Nothing can enter there that defileth." What then? Are there cleansing fires through which those must pass after death who are too good for hell and not good enough for heaven, that they may have all that is bad burnt out of them, and where they shall be purged from their sins by the purifying flame? This is the Romish idea; not perhaps so very unnatural, when we think how much sin cleaves to us to the last, and how many imperfections and impurities cling to the best, but wholly false. How, then, are Christian men to be severed from their sins, and delivered from "the wood, and hay, and stubble" which they have so foolishly wrought into their lives? If they have "the root of the matter" in them, and are really in Christ, they shall not be suffered to perish, they shall be "saved, yet so as by fire"—by the purifying fires of affliction and sorrow, which through a severe disciplinary process shall burn up the chaff, and

sever it from the suffering soul. And this may explain the sufferings of a long illness, the protracted pains of a dying-bed. Trial is sanctified by God. "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth." "He chastens us for our own profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness." "Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try you." "He shall sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver, and He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver is purged; that they may offer unto God an offering in righteousness." Trials, in God's mercy, are the cleansing fires out of which he who suffers comes forth as gold refined. Suffering here is a purgative discipline, intended to save us from being "condemned with the world" hereafter. Very painful is this corrective process, this burning up of the straw and refuse which Christians have wrought into their lives; very terrible is this ordeal, with all God's judgment fires at furnace-heat, sparing nothing that will burn; very agonizing is that searching fire which, penetrating to the heart, consumes what is worthless in its cleansing flame. "The fining pot for silver, and the furnace for gold; but the Lord trieth the heart." "Our God is a consuming fire." Happy they who need not this chastening discipline, and who are building into their characters "gold, and silver, and precious stones," who are going on to perfection! Happy they! But, brethren, thank God for the trial which purifies. It is better, is it not, to be humbled and cleansed, and to have all that is worthless about us consumed, than to "lose ourselves, and to be cast away"? If you are

walking inconsistently ; if you are proud, self-willed, earthly-minded, pleasure-seeking, welcome the purifying flame, in whatever shape it is sent—that of sickness, or bereavement, failure, or disappointment—and thank God that while the dross in your soul is burned, and you "suffer loss,"—the right eye, the right hand, the right foot,—you yourself are "saved, yet so as by fire."

As the last thought, I would impress on those who are just entering life, the unspeakable blessing of beginning to serve the Lord from their youth, and of at once setting about building with "gold, silver, and precious stones," and so forming the character and the habits after the highest model, and on the firmest foundation.

My young brethren, I speak principally to you. Give yourselves in your youth to Christ. You have golden opportunities before you of "laying up treasure in heaven." Many an older Christian, who looks back with regret on time mis-spent, and talents permitted to lie unimproved, would gladly change places with you, and have a life before him for serving God. I know—thank God for the knowledge—that "the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin ;" that it is "a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," even "the chief." It is our delight to preach a gospel which invites the worst and most worthless, the hardest, vilest, most hoary-headed sinner, to come to "the fountain for sin and uncleanness opened," to "believe on the Lord Jesus and be saved."

Every one of us has sin enough on our conscience to humble us at the foot of the Cross, and to make it impossible for us to be saved but through the atoning death of Christ, and the sanctifying grace of the Spirit. It is not necessary to be a great sinner to need mercy. But surely it is better to be kept from sins than to have them pardoned. Is not "a conscience which is void of offence toward God and toward man" better than a conscience darkened with guilt, even though that guilt may be done away, and "blotted out as a thick cloud"? Blessed is the man whose sins, "though they be as scarlet, shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, shall be as wool;" but more blessed is he who, "kept back from presumptuous sins," and preserved "innocent of the great transgression," is "planted from the first by the rivers of waters," and "brings forth his fruit in due season;" or, to vary the illustration, whose "path" from the first has been that of "the just man," each stage, from the earliest in the journey of life, "shining more and more unto the perfect day." Oh, believe me, it is a thousand times better to give the early days of life to God, to serve Him from our youth, and to build from the first all that is holy into our life and character, than to be brought, in the evening of our days, with wasted time, and buried talents, and a burdened conscience, and a soul defiled with transgression, to the Saviour whom we might have loved and served before. I say it is a thousand times better, and nobler, and more generous to devote health and strength and vigour to God, than to give Him the miserable dregs of life;

and having at last discovered the pleasure of His service, to spend the short time that remains to us on earth in vain regrets that we had not "known the things that belong to our peace" sooner; and so to pass into eternity with no work done that shall abide —with nothing but "the wood, the hay, the stubble," which shall be "burnt in the fire." Happy is the man who creates for himself no such sorrowful inheritance as this; who in the end of his days is not compelled to look back on years wasted in sin and folly, and to cry with an exceeding great and bitter cry, "Thou makest me to possess the sins of my youth!" We talk much and we preach much of the thief who was saved on the Cross—who was saved at the eleventh hour, when devils in hell fancied themselves secure of their victim; and I thank God that we have such an example of saving mercy—an example forbidding any to despair. But who wishes to be saved in this way—saved, and nothing more; "saved, yet so as by fire"? And will that penitent thief's place in heaven be as high as that of Paul—apostle, confessor, martyr —who lived for Christ, and died for Christ; or that of Timothy, who "from a child knew the Holy Scriptures," "which are able to make wise unto salvation"? *I* cannot think it. *You* cannot think it. "God will reward every man according to his works." And if there shall be some crowns in heaven which shall be "starless," because the wearer has saved no souls, and brought no sinners there with him, there shall be some brows without a crown at all. "Behold, I come quickly," saith the Saviour to the angel of the

Church in Philadelphia: "hold that fast which thou hast, that no man *take thy crown.*" I beseech you, therefore, not to think that it will be all the same at last, whether for a lifetime you have been "steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," or whether there are no "works" which shall "follow you to heaven." In the one case you shall have "an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ;" in the other you shall be "saved, yet so as by fire."

I know that Christ is "able to save to the uttermost all that come to God through Him;" but I cannot believe that He, who is "the Truth," will say to any one who has just been "plucked as a brand from the burning," at the close of life—to a man who has wasted his days in ease, and pleasure, and self-indulgence, "Well done!" Such "well done" would be felt to be a mockery, not only by others, but by the man himself. It would make him hang his head in shame at praise so undeserved.

No! such commendation is for others. It is for those who have "given all diligence to make their calling and election sure;" who have "fought the fight and kept the faith;" who, "forgetting the things that are behind, have reached forth unto those that are before." These are the servants who, when the Master comes to reckon with them, shall hear from His lips words which shall make all labours and sacrifices endured for Him less than nothing, words which shall be fraught with a joy beyond all joy—"Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been

faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Brethren, a question, and I have done. There may be some here whose works are not only "wood, hay, stubble," but who themselves are "wood, hay, stubble," with no real spiritual life—not even on the Foundation—having neither faith, nor love, nor loyalty to Christ. What of you? "If the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" "Your end is to be burned." That Judge is at the door, "whose fan is in His hand, who will throughly purge His floor, and gather the wheat into the garner; but the chaff He will burn up with unquenchable fire."

There are others here who are on the Foundation, but who are not doing Christ's work, or carrying out Christ's will as they ought. You are building in a manner unworthy of your high calling; you are working into your lives worldly and bad materials, things that will feed the last conflagration and perish in the flame. What of you? "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss,"—"the loss" of a whole life, "loss" that can never be made up, though with eternity before you—"but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire."

There are others—oh, may I not hope it?—who are not only on the Foundation, but who are building into their lives "gold, silver, and precious stones,"—truth, and virtue, and strength—wisdom, and goodness, and love. "The love of Christ" constrains you to live not unto yourselves, but unto Him.

And what of you? "If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward." The "gold, silver, and precious stones" shall be indestructible. Not one particle of either can perish. They will shine all the more clearly after they have come from the furnace-flame of the judgment of God. And our work "abiding," we shall have part in the endless glory with which God at last overpays the services, even as He now over-answers the prayers of His faithful servants; and shall rejoice with a solemn joy as we behold emerging from the fire that fair structure which is "incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."

The Abundant Entrance.

"Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—2 PETER i. 10, 11.

ST. PETER is addressing Christians. He is not pressing the acceptance of the gospel on the impenitent and unbelieving. Those to whom he writes have faith; and as having faith they are exhorted to "add" to it all the other graces that he enumerates. And what are these? The fifth verse supplies the answer: "And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity."

That is to say, the one foundation on which a Christian life is to be based—Christ Himself—having been laid by God Himself, you are to build upon it all the excellences of the Christian character. So building, there will be nothing of failure, but rather

a steady progress in the Divine life: "For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The text is both practical and experimental. "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure." Your "calling" and "election." Your "calling" first, your "election" afterwards; your "election" ascertained by ascertaining your "calling." And what is the "calling" to which the apostle refers? Effectual calling. Not the mere "call" of the gospel reaching the ear—for "many" are so "called," while "few are chosen." It is not the "call" to the wedding-feast, "all things are ready, come ye to the marriage," for many "with one accord begin to make excuse." But it is the voice of the Spirit accompanying the Word, speaking to the conscience, and so moving the heart, and drawing the soul to God. It was thus that Christ while on earth "called" the disciples; "called" them personally, spoke to each man apart from the crowd; finding one "sitting at the receipt of custom," and another "mending his nets" by the seashore; saying unto them, "Follow Me," "and they left all, and followed Him."

It was thus the Christians at Thessalonica were "called." St. Paul, in writing to them, says, "For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance."

Brethren, there is a Divine power attending the

"call" of the believer, in whatever way the "call" may come as to outward instrumentality: a Divine power which distinguishes it from the mere hearing of the ear. To some the "call" comes so suddenly and strikingly that they cannot but be aware of the precise period when it is given. The change from the natural and earthly life to the supernatural and heavenly is most decided and marked. Many of the most remarkable men in the Church of Christ have been, in all times, the subjects of this sudden and decided transformation: St. Paul, Augustine, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, with a great multitude of others, some in our own day, perhaps within our own experience, whose conversion, attended by a marked change of heart and life, proves the presence of the old Pentecostal power amongst us still; and that God, as of old, "rends the heavens, and comes down" in the baptism of fire. On the other hand, the "call" comes to many, not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but in "the still small voice;" they grow up from their earliest days into the light and life of the gospel, and are unable to point to the time when they crossed the boundary-line; or to tell when the archer wounded them, and the arrow of conviction pierced home to the heart. This has been the case with many eminent Christians. They have been trained under holy influences, have been planted from the first "by the rivers of waters," and have "brought forth fruit in due season," each stage in life being distinguished by an appropriate growth in grace. But still, whenever a soul is brought into this new

sense and view of things, it is by the direct power of the Spirit of God. Whether a man be alarmed by "the terrors of the law," and be called loudly to "flee for refuge to the hope set before him in the gospel," or whether he be made willing in the day of God's power, and thus be called gently by a sweet constraining voice, "drawn with the cords of a man and the bands of love," the call is that of the Spirit who comes and goes as He lists, and makes known His presence only by the results which are produced.

And the call, whether it come strong as the tempest, or soft as the breeze, shattering proud thoughts at a blow, or gently moving and winning the heart to Christ, must be heard and answered by every one who would be saved.

This is the "calling" that we are to "make sure;" and this "calling" is the result of "election." St. Paul gives all the links of that golden chain which binds the believer to the heart and throne of God, in the familiar verses of the eighth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, "Moreover, whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified." When this doctrine is brought forward in Scripture it is not treated in an argumentative way, or controversially, but as a great and practical truth. Ay, as a truth full of most sweet and unspeakable comfort; for the "election" is always connected with life and blessing. The sacred writers never argue upon it, never try to harmonize it with other statements of the Bible, but speak of it as a

gracious part of "the whole counsel of God." And let us be assured of this, that whether we can understand it or not, there is a harmony between this doctrine of "election" and all other doctrines of Scripture; and, whether we have discovered it or not, there is a principle somewhere which reconciles the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man. Let us not reject the doctrine because we are not able to understand it. "Who by searching can find out God? Who can find out the Almighty to perfection?" Into this awful mystery we dare not intrude. It is the cloud which rests on the mercy-seat of God. But a voice from out of the cloud declares that "God is love;" it is enough. I believe where I cannot reason; I adore though I cannot comprehend. I am confident that when the "clouds and darkness" which are now about Jehovah are removed, and we see all things in the clear shinings of our Father's face, it shall be manifest to every one that "the Judge of all the earth doeth right," and that if "His ways are past finding out," yet that "righteousness and judgment" are the pillars of His throne.

But to return. It is our effectual "calling" and our "election" that we are to "make sure." Not indeed more sure in the sight of God. That cannot be. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." "I know My sheep, and am known of Mine." Their names are "graven on the palms of His hands," and are "written in the Lamb's book of life, from the foundation of the world." But we can make it sure to ourselves, to our own consciousness, to our own

apprehension. Our "election" is known by our effectual "calling," by our passing from darkness to light, by our being able to say, "Whereas I was blind, now I see." And our effectual calling is known by its fruits, by the inward witness of the Spirit, and by our following after that "holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." For, brethren, there is such a thing as assurance of salvation. And this assurance is not the boldness of presumptuous confidence; not the wild fancy of the fanatic, who thinks that because he has passed through certain emotions and certain experiences, he is therefore on his way to heaven, and has been given the seal of his acceptance with God. Assurance is that personal trust in Christ as our living Redeemer which fills the heart with "joy and peace in believing," and the life with those "fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God."

You are not to think, however, that this knowledge of Christ—this assurance that I am His and He is mine—is ours on the sole condition of an initial act of faith. It is ours on the condition of loving obedience, and of daily effort, not in our own strength, but in God's, to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, and to perfect holiness with the fear of God." We are to "work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Let us work as well as believe, and in the daily practice of faithful obedience, in the resolute subjugation of our will to the Divine, in the deter-

mined crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts, make more thoroughly our own that which we possess. Let us work into the substance of our souls that which we have, and strive to "apprehend that for which we are apprehended of Christ Jesus."

It is thus, and thus alone, that we can carry out, to our comfort and peace and joy, the exhortation of the text, and give "all diligence to make our calling and election sure."

Consider the promise: "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall." There is nothing which the true child of God more dreads than falling into sin. And how is he to be secured against this? How shall you and I, Christian brethren, be kept from everything that would bring dishonour upon our Christian profession, and dim the lustre of our Christian graces? How shall we "hold on our way and wax stronger and stronger"? Just by "giving diligence to make our calling and election sure." By doing "these things," by "adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity." By adding grace to grace. How can you fall if you are ever going on thus to perfection? You will have no time to fall, there will be no possibility of falling, if you are always engaged in watchfulness and prayer, in "keeping under the body," in "bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

If David had been adding to his faith "temper-

ance," self-government, self-control, he would never have thrown the reins on the neck of passion and allowed it to hurry him into the grossest sin ; and had he been adding to his faith "brotherly kindness," he would not have wronged Uriah, or placed him in the front of the battle, and thus proved guilty of his death. Had Peter been adding to his faith "manly courage," he would not have quailed before the sneer of a maid-servant, and denied his Master with oaths.

You will generally find that when a Christian is betrayed into sin, the fall is due less to the sudden power of temptation than to what preceded it, and prepared for it. There has been a secret declension of the life of God in the soul, a loss of spiritual vigour and strength, an unwatchful prayerless walk ; the flame of love has been allowed to burn low, almost to die out on the altar of the heart. And this secret decay in piety, *this* prepares the way for a "fall."

As you have passed through a wood or forest, you may have seen, lying across your path on the ground, a fine and stately oak, a giant tree, taller than its fellows of the wood. How fearful, you have thought, must have been the gale that laid so noble a tree in the dust ! But, if you look more closely, you discover the reason. The tree fell under the strain of the winds, while others, apparently weaker, outlived the tempest, because the worm had attacked the core, and there had been for some time a gradual process of decay within. The destructive insect had left the outer bark unimpaired, but had gnawed its way into the heart. It is when the heart is slowly but surely eaten

out by the canker-worm of a decaying piety, by presumption, or by self-confidence, that the way is prepared for a "fall." Beware of a secret declension in grace, lest nothing be left to you but the outer shell of an empty and barren profession. See that nothing enter, or find lodgment within, that can hurt or defile, and so prepare the way for sins from which you think you are safe, at which, if any one hinted, you would turn round upon him with flashing eye and scornful lip, asking the indignant question, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do such things?"

But we have another motive still, in the text, for "diligence," and one which appeals to our hope: "For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Every true Christian is building a life-structure on the "one Foundation" that has been laid. Some are building "gold and silver and precious stones," honesty and truth, and love to God, and loyalty to Christ; some "wood and hay and stubble," low views, and carnal opinions, formalism, and a superficial piety. A time is at hand when "the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work be burned, he shall suffer loss, but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire." The work burned, the workman saved—saved with difficulty, "scarcely saved," "plucked as a brand from the burning," saved amid tears and terror and distress, "saved, yet so as by fire."

Now the text assures us that there is a being "saved abundantly;" saved, and much more; saved, as one who is "more than conqueror;" saved, with the welcome and "well done" of that Master who, at His coming, will "reward every man according to his works." It is after this full salvation, this "abundant entrance, that the apostle summons us to strive. For, though admission into heaven at all is an act of grace; though sanctification comes through believing, and is incapable of degrees, being conferred on all who are Christ's, in virtue of their union with Him by faith, yet there is a station nearer to the throne as well as a "gift" of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. There is a sowing plenteously and a reaping plenteously, a sowing little and a reaping of a scanty harvest, a crown which has a richer splendour, and a crown which is starless and of lesser glory. And we are bidden to "covet earnestly the more excellent gifts," not to rest content with only getting to heaven, with just crossing the threshold and escaping by a hair's-breadth the world of outer darkness and despair. It is a very dwarfed and stunted piety which says, "Let me only get to heaven, but stand within its doorway, and I shall be satisfied. I am content to be less than the least of all saints, willing to be saved as the penitent thief. This may be humility, but it may not. It may be the language of indifference or indolence. For surely this concern for our personal safety only; this unconcern about securing the "abundant entrance," is in reality unconcern about that spiritual character which is the germ of

future glory, and out of which shall flow, as a natural consequence, our heaven and our happiness hereafter. It is just the same littleness of soul which belongs to a student at the university, who, indifferent to the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake, content if, by hook or by crook, he manages to obtain his degree, has no thought of being distinguished or of seeking for honour and glory by "patient continuance in well-doing." It is, I repeat, an indifference to the development of spiritual character, and to an ever-growing conformity to Christ, a disregard of that "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost," which, and nothing outside us—no golden streets and jasper walls and rivers of crystal waters—is the essence of the kingdom of God, which makes you indifferent to the "abundant entrance." Instead of trading with your talents; instead of being diligent in your work, you are thinking only of self, and not at all of your Redeemer's honour; and you regard the gospel simply as a happy contrivance for saving you from hell, not as a gracious plan for making you like God. Salvation by fire: that is all you are looking for. But, I pray you, do not think that it will be all the same if you are "scarcely saved" at last, or if you are saved "abundantly." Why is it that so many, who have professed themselves Christ's, meet death with a certain degree of terror and alarm? Why is it that we clergymen are sometimes called to stand at death-beds, and to look into eyes filled with sad regret? Why are we pained by anxiety which it is difficult to still? Brethren, I think that we

preachers are too apt to describe believers as they ought to be rather than as they are, and to speak of all who are in Christ as if they had reached the same measure of attainment. Thus we paint every dying Christian as a man seated on the borders of the river, only waiting the summons to cross, and looking back on the world he is leaving, without a tear, and forward to the world he is about to enter, with a smile. We picture him calm, and hopeful, and expectant, seeing glories that others cannot see, and stretching out longing arms to the farther shore, with the yearning cry, "O that I had the wings of a dove, for then would I flee away, and be at rest." The picture may be sometimes drawn from the life, but, alas! not always. Often, as every clergyman can bear painful witness, the reverse is the case. And how comes it that so many who have professed themselves Christ's meet death with so much fear and shrinking? Why is there so little peace and joy? Why is there so much anxiety to live, and so much that is clouded and dark and saddening about their last hours? Because their practice has fallen so far below their profession that they have not an "abundant entrance" into the kingdom of heaven, and though saved, are "saved so as by fire." And can those whose lives have not "adorned the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things" meet their Master with uplifted heads and joyful hearts, as He comes to call His people to give account of their stewardship? And can heaven be the same to those who have not "shined as lights in the world," but whose profession has been dim and

clouded and uncertain? However blessed heaven may be—and I know when we enter there all tears shall be wiped away—will there be nothing, as the sentences of the Judgment are pronounced, to overshadow the joy, to darken the happiness in the thought that we are not what we might have been, and where we might have been, in the kingdom of God? I cannot answer these questions; but, as I believe in degrees of glory in heaven, and that, while we are "saved by grace," we shall be judged by works, and rewarded accordingly, I leave these questions for your solemn consideration. I content myself with saying that there is all the difference between the man who is "scarcely saved" and the man who has an "abundant entrance" into life, that there is between the entrance of a vessel after a voyage into the haven, with her sails torn, her crew wearied and weather-beaten, her masts bent and broken, her cargo lost, herself just brought into harbour, and a vessel that, having battled bravely with wind and wave, and bearing many signs of hard service, yet comes into port with swelling canvas and flying colours, her freightage rich and secure, her sailors raising the joyous shout and song as, amid acclamations from the shore, they drop anchor in the sunny bay.

The Christian who has an "abundant entrance" will have no darkness or cloud about his death-bed; he will feel that to "depart and be with Christ is far better"—that having made it "Christ to live he shall find it gain to die." As the eye of faith pierces the mists that hang over death's dark flood, as he descries

the "shining ones" walking on the other shore, and as he hears the summons, "Come up higher," the desire of his heart will express itself in some such words as these: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

Or, if the Saviour comes before he die, he will have boldness, and be ready to go out to meet Him, with loins girt and lamp burning, the song of welcome on his lips, "Lo! this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us. This is the Lord, we will be glad, and rejoice in His salvation." And in eternity, when the "well done" has been spoken in his ears, and he has entered on his reward, he shall have a station near to the throne, a place close to his Master's person, a crown lustrous and rich, and a "far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Thus shall it be done unto the man whose work abides, because it has been of the nature of "gold and silver and precious stones." "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the King delighteth to honour."

And, now, how shall it be with us? Are we, brethren, beloved in the Lord, able to say, "This one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those that are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus"? Are we thus pressing onward and upward, not because we are thinking of wages to be paid, not in the spirit of a mercenary bargain, but because the service of Christ is a reward in itself, because we cannot help serving Him, because "the

love of Christ constraineth us"? You are not thinking of rewards in your service of the Master; you are not calculating on a higher or lower place in heaven; you are not asking to be set down on the right hand or on the left in His kingdom? You leave this for those "for whom it is prepared of the Father." You are but obeying unconsciously the laws and instincts of your spiritual life. You are serving, not in the spirit of a hireling, but of a child. Your reward is in God Himself more than in His gifts. You feel that "wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." You know the "great peace they have who love God's law."

If this be the case, all is well. Let "the day" come which shall "make manifest your work." Let "the fire" which is to try it be kindled, ay, to a white heat. It shall not consume it. "The work shall abide," and you shall "have a reward." Your work shall be proved to be "gold and silver and precious stones," and these shall gleam and flash in the light, and be "found to the honour and glory of God."

And thus, having carried out the exhortation of the apostle, and having "given all diligence to make your calling and election sure"—at death, at the advent, in eternity—"an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

The Divine Goodness.

"The Lord is good, a Strong Hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."—NAHUM i. 7.

THESE beautiful words follow a sublime yet terrible description of God. Occurring where they do, they are "like the clear shining of the sun after rain."

"The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite. God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies. The Lord is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the Lord hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at Him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at His presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before His indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness

of His anger? His fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by Him."

The words thrill us as we read. The only statement in them on which, as sinners, we can dwell with pleasure is that which is found in the third verse: "The Lord is slow to anger." But now in the seventh verse there are words which reassure the mind after the awe-inspiring description of God given by the prophet. They come like a calm after a storm, like the day-dawn after the night, like the bright and beautiful spring after the dark and dreary winter. "The Lord is good, a Strong Hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

Let us take the words for our meditation this morning: "The Lord is good." So says the prophet, one of those holy men who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." "God," the name we apply to the Divine Being, means "good." "God" and "good" are the selfsame words. Because they believed Him to be in His nature perfectly holy, and to all His creatures infinitely gracious—because "goodness" is the most winning and engaging feature in His character—our Saxon forefathers called Him "Good," shortening the word into "God." And because He is "good," He demands goodness in us. "He loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity, and is against the wicked and on the side of the upright." In this the God of the Bible differs from all heathen gods. Their gods were but the deification of the worst passions of humanity, and what they required

from their worshippers was outward and formal observances, votive offerings for their temples, and sacrifices for their altars. Our God "requireth truth in the inward parts," and being "a Spirit, we are to worship Him in spirit and in truth." To please Him, we must be "good," and do "good." Nothing can be put in the place of "goodness," for salvation in its complete sense is restoration to the image we lost at the fall. May God give us grace to understand this!

Yes, God is essentially "good"—infinitely, immutably "good." The creation of worlds and their inhabitants is but the manifestation of His goodness, while the happiness of all that breathe flows from Him as "the author and giver of every good and perfect gift." The blessings scattered over the universe are as so many beams from the Sun, so many drops from the Fountain from which springs all our joy. "He is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works." But His "goodness" does not assume its highest form in the bounties of providence, or in His gifts to creatures such as angels who, having never forfeited His love, carry out the purposes for which they were created. But it does so appear to us who are sinners, who have broken His law, done despite to His Spirit, and run counter to His will. We are "transgressors from the womb," "children of disobedience," "alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in us, because of the blindness of our hearts." Yet such is His marvellous lovingkindness that He is ready, on our

repentance, to pass by iniquity, transgression, and sin, and invites us to "put our trust under the shadow of His wings." Everything proves His "goodness." The mark of His love is upon all. When He drove the man out of the garden "planted eastward in Eden," He might have placed him in a waste-howling wilderness, where every sight would have been painful, and every sound a discord. But see what a world He has placed us in, full of a beauty which we have only to open our eyes to see. There is a splendour in every sunrise and every sunset, a radiancy of light and colour in the moon, a glory in the clouds, a solemn loveliness in the clear, starlit skies. And these winter days have their charms also. The wondrous glow and gleam of the sun upon the snow; the branches sparkling like diamonds with frosty rime; the coral berries that brighten hedge and tree; the curves of the bare boughs against the clear, pale sky—these and a thousand other beauties and splendours lie around our daily path; and all are proofs of "the goodness" of God. But rising above nature and providence, we say with St. John, "Herein is love," as though it were nowhere else to be found—"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the Propitiation for our sins." Yes, indeed, herein is love—that, without our desire or desert, "God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law, to redeem us who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons."

This unspeakable gift ensures every other. "He that spared not His own Son, but gave Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?"

I read the goodness of God in the mercies that are borne on the wings of every hour, supply our table, flow in our cup, fall in every shower, shine in every sunbeam, and lie as thick around our homes as the manna that fell from heaven round Israel's tents of old. But, above all, I read it on that cross where "Mercy and truth met together, righteousness and peace kissed each other." I read it in "the grace that abounds over our abounding sin." In the patience and long-suffering that is "not extreme to mark what we have done amiss," and has not cut us down as "cumberers of the ground." In the love that meets the returning prodigal in his rags and wretchedness, and opens its arms to enfold him, all unworthy as he is; in the mercy that pleads with sinners, and beseeches them to be reconciled; in the compassion that "weeps with them that weep," and dries the tear on sorrow's cheek; in the grace that despises none, despairs of none, and, not to be repelled by foulest sin, stands by the guilty bed, and, bending down to the ear chilled by the approach of death, cries in the yearning tones of compassion—"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" In all this I see an evidence of the truth—"The Lord is good."

"He is a Strong Hold in the day of trouble."

"The day of trouble"! We all know what this

means, for "man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards" from a blacksmith's anvil. Some bitter ingredients mingle with every man's cup. Trouble in some form or another checkers a life "which at birth begins with a cry, and at death ends with a groan." From "troubles" none are exempt, the best no more than the worst. Indeed, trial is among the promises of God's children. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Our Master was a "Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" and are we not "predestinated to be conformed to His image"? But though God does not keep His people from trouble, He is their refuge under it, their relief in it. As the marginal reading gives it, "He is their Strength in the day of trouble."

And what a blessing, when sorrow or anxiety befalls us, to be able to "run into this Strong Hold;" to take shelter under the wings of Him who is "the Dwelling-place of His people in all generations." When man, with all the will in the world, cannot help us, when he can do nothing to soothe—oh, the blessedness of knowing that there is One who "comforteth them that are cast down;" who "in all our affliction is afflicted too."

"A Strong Hold in the day of trouble." So Job felt when in one day he was bereft of servants, flocks and herds, sons and daughters. When "deep called unto deep at the noise of God's waterspouts," and billow after billow passed over him; he went down beneath the waves, never, as it seemed, to rise again; but

"many waters" cannot drown faith, even as it "cannot quench love," and so he raised his head above the waves, and as he looked round on the desolation—fortune and family gone—he had the strength to say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord." And what faith was David's, when, surrounded by many and powerful enemies, he was able, looking a host in the face, to say, "The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, whom shall I fear? the Lord is the Strength of my life, of whom shall I be afraid?"

Brethren, are you making God your Refuge? "The day of trouble" will come. The day of sorrow, when the heart will ache, and the tears will flow, and a light will have passed from the world, and you will go "mourning all the day long." The day of sickness, the darkened room, the anxious watching by the bed, the low whispers of friends, the grave looks of the physician, the restless days, the wakeful nights. The day of death will come, which no medicine can avert, no physician ward off, no prayers turn aside, when the soul shall be parted from the body, and shall go forth alone into the presence of its God and Judge. And what will you do in such times as these?

Brethren, turn to Him now, that "when these things begin to come to pass," ye may find the Lord Who is "good" a "Strong Hold in the day of trouble."

"He knoweth them that trust in Him."

Does He not know those who do not trust in Him? Yes, He does. "His eyes are upon the ways of man, and He pondereth all their goings. There is no

darkness nor shadow of death where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves."

This knowledge, therefore, seems to you no privilege if it be common to the righteous and the wicked. But it *is* a privilege, and it gives no light satisfaction to the Christian to think of the words of "God manifest in the flesh," "the Good Shepherd," "I know My sheep, and am known of Mine." "He knoweth us." He knoweth us under the misconception of friends and the reproaches of enemies. He knoweth us better than wife or child, husband or friend.

> "Not e'en the tenderest heart, and next our own,
> Knows half the reasons why we smile and sigh."

But "He knoweth them that are His," and knows them thoroughly.

"He knoweth their frame, and remembereth that they are but dust." "He knoweth their soul in adversity." He knows when to afflict, and how to comfort; how to smite, and how to heal; how to wound, and how to cure, and how with the affliction to send the abounding consolation. He knows, too, how to deliver them when "cast into darkness and the deep;" and so He brings it to pass that "all things work together for their good."

But the knowledge of God here does not signify only mere perception or intelligence; it is the knowledge of complacency, approval, and delight. "If a man love God, the same is known of Him;" that is, "he is approved of, and delighted in." Therefore said David, "The Lord knoweth the way of the

righteous;" He takes pleasure in it; "while the way of the ungodly shall perish." Is it not said, "He takes pleasure in them that fear Him, in them that hope in His mercy"?

Their prayers are His delight; they go up to Him as the morning incense, or as the smoke of the evening sacrifice. Their alms, received as gifts to Himself, are an odour of a sweet smell. Their services are regarded as spiritual sacrifices acceptable to Him through the merits of His Son.

And if these things be so, well may we echo the words of the Psalmist, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." "Trust!" The life and soul of religion is in this word "trust." Trust brings the creature into his proper place, and makes him hang upon God. "Trust" acknowledges dependence; trust realizes confidence. Acknowledged dependence as a creature, and realized confidence as a child—these are the elements of religion; in these the life-blood of salvation flows into the soul of man. Down in the dust as creatures, and up in the bosom of God as children; true humility and true confidence, these are ever the characteristics of true religion in man. "Trust." This does Him honour; nothing glorifies Him more, nor is there any grace greater than this; it is this which enables the Christian to go on his way, if "faint, yet pursuing." We are "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." It is trust in God which is the secret of our strength, and which lifts us above

the ills to which we are exposed into the clear light of confidence and hope.

And think of the promises that are made to the trusting soul! "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee, because he trusteth in Thee." "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord." "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever." And, again, what comfort, what consolation trust imparts to the mind in times of sorrow and adversity. This it was that enabled Eli, in the midst of terrible calamities, to say, "It is the Lord; let Him do what seemeth Him good." Well might the Psalmist say, "Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before Him." Happy are they who make God their trust. Have we done so? Have we trusted Him with our souls? with our bodies? with our business? with our families? Have we "committed our way unto Him"? "Clouds and darkness may be round about Him," He may "move in a mysterious way;" but can we take comfort from the words, "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter"? "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face; now I know in part, but then shall I know even as also I am known." "If God be our God," why not trust in Him more entirely, and depend upon Him more fully? How beautiful the words of Job! "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him." What lofty faith! What sublime resignation! And cannot we trust Him so

far? Is He not "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever"? Is He not to us all He was to Job? Yea, ought He not to be more? For has not He, who spoke to Job "out of the whirlwind," "spoken to us through the lips of His only begotten Son"? And these lips were full of grace and truth. Surely, the Incarnation—when He became manifest to men—laid bare to us His heart, and we know Him better than Job did.

Brethren, He is worthy of our trust; let us give it Him. Let us give it Him now. The time is coming when we shall have no one else to trust to. On the death-bed, what can other friends do for us? For the body, something. They can smooth the pillow, wipe the death-sweat from the face, hold the hand, and shade the light from the eyes. But for the soul, save directing it to Jesus, nothing. And what shall we do in prospect of a tribunal where "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil"?

Do? What can we do, but flee to Him now for refuge? trust in Him? lay our sins upon Him? and, throwing our fears to the wind, die with our head pillowed on His breast; fall asleep in the everlasting arms, that we may awake with Him to the life immortal. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Do? What can we do, but with our last conscious gaze fixed on His cross, breathe out our life in words like these: "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded He is able

to keep that which I have committed to Him against the day"?

Brethren, I say once more with all earnestness, "Trust in the Lord." "O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." Let none be afraid to do so, as if their sins were too great to be forgiven, or their case past remedy. "God waiteth to be gracious," and through Christ the door of heaven stands open to all penitent sinners. Let all who would be saved from sin come, and they will find a ready welcome from Him "who has no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but would have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth." However many and justified your fears and doubts may be, believe in spite of all that "the Lord is good, a Strong Hold in the day of trouble, and He knoweth them that trust in Him."

Concerning them which are Asleep.

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."—1 THESS. iv. 13.

AS we are living in a world where death is always busy, where it is the fate of all that lives to die—where death is, as it were, the shadow which life casts upon the ground—the state of the dead must possess for us the deepest interest. Where do they pass when the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl broken at the fountain? What are their employments, what is their state? Can the disembodied soul be actively engaged in the service of God? We have many friends in the world beyond the grave, many are there whom we loved; we have marked how the close of a Christian life was illumined with the hopes and the light of approaching glory. Where are the loved ones gone when absent from the body? And we ourselves, we too shall die; we shall leave the cheerful voices and bright faces of the family circle, and shall pass from blue skies, the song of birds, and all that we love and are familiar with; and where shall

we be when friends have spoken their last "farewell," and "the place that knew us shall know us no more"?

It is only in the Word of God that we can find any light thrown on such questions. The state of the departed would be a profound mystery were it not for the Bible. This Book has lifted the veil from the invisible world, and revealed to us the state of the dead.

Let us consider, then, what the Scriptures disclose to us "concerning them which are asleep." It is a striking instance of the transforming power of Christian faith, that it converts death into a thing so beautiful, so to be desired, as "sleep." For death in itself is unnatural and repulsive; flesh and blood shrink from it, and it is always spoken of in Scripture as "an enemy," a part of the original curse. There are other ills to which flesh is heir, and from which we recoil—the ills of poverty and disease, of slander, and pain, and exile; but death is regarded as greater than all, and the universal voice of mankind crowns him "the king of terrors." You will remember how Milton, when he pictures Satan on his flight to our world, represents him as encountering two grim and grisly forms sitting before the adamantine gates of hell. One is Sin, fair yet foul, the mother of Death; the other, Death himself, fierce and terrible, and accursed.

> "Before the gates there sat
> On either side a formidable shape;
> The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,
> But ended foul in many a scaly fold

> Voluminous and vast ; a serpent armed
> With mortal sting. The other shape,
> If shape it might be called that shape had none
> Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb ;
> Or substance might be called that shadow seem'd,
> For each seemed either ; black it stood as night,
> Fierce as ten furies, terrible as hell,
> And shook a dreadful dart : what seem'd his head
> The likeness of a kingly crown had on."

Yes ; Death, the shadow crowned, is a king. As St. Paul says, he "reigned from Adam to Moses," and he has reigned through the centuries since then, and reigns still, and all are compelled to obey his rule and to go down before his inexorable scythe. "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned."

But see the transforming power of the faith of Christ. It strips this king of his terrors, wrests the sceptre from his hand, plucks the crown from his brow, and robs him of his sting. It transforms him into a fair messenger of peace, who brings to the weary and the troubled "Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep." Death in the New Testament, when connected with believers, is ever spoken of as "a falling asleep," and "sleep" is the most frequent term employed by the sacred writers to describe the condition of the holy dead. "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth," the Saviour said, "and I go to awake him out of sleep." When Jesus yielded up the ghost, and the earth shook with a great earthquake, so that rocks were rent asunder, and graves were opened, many bodies of the saints

which "slept" arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the Holy City, and appeared unto many." When the cruel and frenzied mob were stoning Stephen, and gnashing upon him with their teeth, "he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep." When St. Paul speaks of the resurrection of the dead, and tells us that the advent of Christ shall find many living on the earth, he says: "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." Thus does Christianity strip death of its repulsiveness, and after we have closed the sightless eyes, and bent down to take one last fond kiss of lips for ever closed, it gives us the strength to say, "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them;" and enables us to add, "For so he giveth His beloved sleep."

Death is likened unto sleep; and why? Because in the case of the Christian it comes as the harbinger of peace. "Man goeth forth to his work and to his labour until the evening;" and then, tired out and wearied, he takes his nightly rest. The soldier, after the hard-fought battle, lays aside his armour, and, wrapping his cloak around him, lies down under the cover of his tent, or beneath the starry skies, to enjoy well-earned repose. He had a toilsome day, but the period for rest has come. And what a blessing "sleep" is. It is, indeed, one of the best gifts bestowed on us by a merciful God who "knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are but dust." It falls on

us as softly as the gentle dew on the parched and thirsty land, or, as it is beautifully said, "like tired eyelids upon tired eyes." It is only they who know what it is to have wakeful nights, who toss upon a sleepless pillow, who long for the coming of the morning, that understand the full blessedness of being able to say with the Psalmist: "I laid me down and slept; I awaked, for the Lord sustained me." The poet, addressing sleep, has these words:—

> "Even thus last night, and two nights more I lay,
> And could not win thee, sleep, by very stealth,
> So do not let me wear to-night away;
> Without thee, what is all the morning's wealth?
> Come, blessed barrier between day and day,
> Dear mother of fresh thoughts, and joyous health!"

As sleep is desirable because it comes with sweet refreshment at the close of a long day of toil, so is death to a believer, who, passing into the separate state, exchanges labour for repose, danger for security, and laying aside his weapons as well as his anxieties, enters into the rest of the Paradise of God.

The separate state is more a state of rest than of active service. For the soul is not a spirit formed to act by itself, but was created to act by means of the body, and through its material organs; and therefore, as separation from the flesh was clearly not provided for in its original structure, we can hardly understand how it can be actively occupied in the Divine service while the earthly tabernacle still moulders in the grave. The utmost that we can ascribe to the separate state, is deep and beautiful

tranquillity; the souls of the righteous, resting in unbroken calm, doubtless ever learning more of God's will, and anticipating the great resurrection day, when the Lord shall raise His buried from the grave. And not only do they rest, but enjoy such manifestations of God as they are capable of receiving in the unclothed state; while they rest they also hope, and cry out like the souls which St. John saw under the altar: "How long, O Lord, how long?" That is, they yearn for the final conquest over death, and for that "manifestation of the sons of God," for which "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." This longing is not that of impatience, or discontent, only they know that not yet have they attained unto the fulness of their bliss, and that they shall be changed from glory to glory, and become inconceivably more capable of serving and enjoying God, when "the last enemy shall be destroyed," and "death be swallowed up in victory."

But though the intermediate state is not one of perfection, what a calm peaceful rest is that which the souls of the righteous enjoy! "They rest from their labours." "They rest from all doubts and fears, weariness and anxiety of mind; they rest from all strife of tongues, contumely and wrong; from unkindness and disappointment, withered hopes and desolation of heart. They rest, too, from the weight of the body of our humiliation, from its sufferings, infirmities and pains. Their last sickness is over. No more the aching head or weary heart; no more the hollow cheek or tear-dimmed eye; no

longer the lines upon the pallid brow, the distress, the weakness, the exhaustion which is in itself pain ; all is over, the broken words have passed into praise, and the weeping into a song of bliss. The warfare with sin, whether from without or within, is accomplished. The devil can tempt no more, nor the world lure, nor self betray. The conflict with "spiritual wickedness in high places" is at an end. Overcoming in the hard fight, they are "more than conquerors" through God's grace, and their hearts have thrilled to their Master's "Well done." Not only so, but they are with Christ: "absent from the body, and present with the Lord." No need of prayers or masses for the soul ; they are at rest. No need of fierce cleansing fires ; they have been "washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord, and by the Spirit of God." "The righteous souls are in the hand of God, and there shall no harm happen unto them." "Delivered from the burden of the flesh, they are in joy and felicity," and are with Him, "whom having not seen they loved, but in whom believing they rejoiced with joy unspeakable, and full of glory." They see His face, and His name is in their foreheads ; and He "feeds them, and leads them to living fountains of water, and God has wiped all tears from their eyes."

And they are not only with Christ, but with those whom they loved on earth, and whose life was hidden here with Christ in God. For the happiness of Paradise, being as perfect as it can be for a disembodied spirit, embraces all the elements in which

happiness consists, and among others the recognition of dear friends, and the revival of old friendships. And surely this should temper our sorrow for the loss of these who "fall asleep in Jesus." We do not bid them an eternal farewell. We shall meet them again if we are Christ's. They have weathered the storm, and are now in the world where no winds rave, and no tempest blow, under the shadow of the everlasting throne. And we, too, in due season, shall "escape from the windy storm and tempest," and reaching "the haven where we would be," stand on the sea of glass mingled with fire, which stretches its tranquil and glorious expanse before the throne of God and of the Lamb. Yes, we shall meet again our dead in Christ, for are we not "bound up in the same bundle of life with the Lord," "knit together in one communion and fellowship in the mystical body of His Son"? It has been beautifully said, "We know that so sure as having lived, we shall live again; that so sure as having loved, we shall love again; and that the separation is but as one beat in the great pendulum of eternity." I do not say that we should not sorrow when a breach is made in our family circle, or when a friend is removed; that were unnatural, that were impossible; but we should not "sorrow as others who have no hope." You cannot help feeling as you look on the vacant chair, you cannot help weeping as something recalls the memory of the departed.

> "The hanging robe or vacant ornament,
> Or ghostly footfall echoing on the stair."

Christianity does not condemn such feelings. We must weep because the objects of our affection have been torn from us; and He who wept at the grave of Lazarus will not frown on the tears of the bereaved. Still, though sorrowful, we should rejoice when we think of the reunion in a world where partings are unknown, and where they that enter it shall be made "pillars in the temple of our God, to go no more out." There is much to comfort us, both on their account and on our own, as we meditate on the peace, and rest, and blessedness of those that are "asleep."

There are many questions which rise to the mind "concerning them that are asleep," and which receive no answer in the Scriptures. God has not seen fit to reveal all about the state of the departed that we should like to know.

For instance, do they know what passes on earth? Are they acquainted with the fortunes of those whom they leave behind to endure "the heat and burden of the day"? That they are interested in the friends from whom they are parted for a season is beyond a doubt. They cannot forget them, and must feel a deep desire for their welfare. The rich man, who lifted up his eyes in hell, still remembered with natural affection his five brethren, and was anxious that they should not come into that place of torment. And must not "the spirits of just men" in Paradise recall with affection those whom they loved on earth, and long that they, too, made more than conquerors over sin, may have an abundant entrance into the joy

of their Lord? They may not know all that concerns those whom they left behind; for there might be much in their circumstances to give them pain; but God may reveal enough to satisfy their anxiety, and communicate all that can give them pleasure.

Again, if our departed ones remember us with affection, do they ever pray for us? They did so on earth; they may do so in Paradise. The souls of them that were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held, cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" And if their blood, like the blood of righteous Abel, cries from the ground for vengeance, and rises into the ears of a Holy Judge who cannot suffer iniquity and cruelty to triumph, may not the voices of the saints plead with God for blessings on those whom they loved, and who are still in the midst of the conflict on earth? We pray for one another here; shall the privilege of intercession not be permitted us there? They are beyond the need of our prayers, and beyond their reach, but we are not beyond theirs. It were, however, vain to speculate. Where Scripture is silent, and the oracle dumb, we may not venture to speak.

And again, who may say where Paradise is, or what the nature of its beauty, or its peace? What are its employments, or its enjoyments? What language do they speak there? What forms do they wear? Who can tell? It matters little. "To die is gain." "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord."

It is enough for us to know that so soon as the last quiver has faded from the lips, or ere the wail has sunk in the chamber of death, the soul has passed into the profound, heavenly, perfect rest of Paradise, and entered upon joys which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered the heart of man to conceive."

Let us see that we make it "Christ to live that we may find it gain to die." Are you so living that your death will be a willing "putting off of this earthly tabernacle"? a calm falling asleep in the arms of Jesus? How shall it be with you when Christ comes to "awake you out of the sleep of death"? Shall you "awake to everlasting shame and contempt, or to everlasting life"? Which shall it be? Choose. Do not harden your hearts. Listen to the pleading, warning, loving Spirit, and come to Christ now. Oh, think what it will be to awake from the sleep of death, only to find yourselves past hope, beyond recovery! Oh, to awake with the consciousness that you can never sleep again!

When our great poet and dramatist would portray the horrors of conscience in the guilty man, whose hands were stained with the blood of the murdered king, his trusting guest, he represents him as hearing a voice—no still, small voice, but a loud, accusing voice, as of an avenger, which cries,

> "Sleep no more!
> Glamis hath murther'd sleep: and therefore Cawdor
> Shall sleep no more; Macbeth shall sleep no more."

God save you from the sleepless anguish on which

impenitent sinners enter at death! May He so "work in you to will and to do," that you, when this short and shadowy life has vanished, and the earthly day is over, and the fight with sin and sorrow passed, having made Christ "all your salvation, and all your desire," shall "fall asleep in Jesus," only to wake up in glory!

The Sleep of God's Beloved.

"For so He giveth His beloved sleep."—PSALM cxxvii. 2.

OR, "Even so He giveth His beloved sleep." The psalmist is placing in marked contrast the anxieties and cares of worldly men and the peace which is the portion of God's "beloved." The great moral of the psalm is this:—"without God's blessing all human solicitude is vain; men can never, by their own efforts, command success. God gives, and man receives." "Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: even so He giveth His beloved sleep." What others obtain only after much wearing toil and constant effort, often with so much disappointment and so much sorrow, God gives to the man whom He loves "while he sleeps"—that is, without all this anxiety and exertion. There is no discouragement here to honest work. We must lay out our plans carefully, if we would have them fulfilled; we must study, if we would learn. It is undue anxiety and

feverish straining, a toiling as if toil of itself could secure the desired end, which is condemned. God's "beloved" are not exempted from the great and general and beneficent law of labour; but the sting is taken out of it when results are left in a Father's hand, with absolute trust in His wisdom and love. They may lay their heads in peace on the pillow, assured that God will give them a sweet, unbroken sleep, awaking from which they shall be enabled in the morning to return with renewed vigour to their duties.

"He giveth His beloved sleep." What a worth is attached to "sleep," to say that God "gives" it to "His beloved"! Is the boon indeed so great? So, at least, thought one to whom weary nights were common things, and who had long lain on a bed of languishing. She, the greatest poetess of our time, has told us that there was no verse in the Book of Psalms which fell upon her ear with such comfort as this :—

> "Of all the thoughts of God that are
> Borne inward unto souls afar,
> Along the psalmist's music deep,
> Now, tell me, if that any is
> For gift, or grace, surpassing this:
> 'He giveth His beloved sleep'?"

As with other common blessings, those to whom sleep comes regularly with the return of night, and who have never had to seek it, and to seek it in vain, are prone to undervalue it, just because it is always enjoyed; but let it take its flight for a season, and we soon learn, from bitter experience, how great and

how wearing to both mind and body is the loss. When the sufferer has been tossing for days and nights on a restless bed; when he has counted in feverish wakefulness the slow moving hours; when at dawn he has cried out, "Would God it were evening!" and in the evening, "Would God it were morning!" he is then made to understand the blessing of that sound slumber which steals over the wearied frame, and wraps the aching limbs in delicious repose. How thankful ought we to be for sleep! I do not wonder that the ancients believed it to be "the gift of the gods;" for it is often the best medicine, doing more to calm the nervous system, to soothe the over-stimulated brain, than all the skill of the most eminent physicians. "Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well," were the words of the disciples to Jesus, when, speaking of the death of Lazarus, the Saviour said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."

And this blessing comes as a gracious gift to all. "God is no respecter of persons." He does not give sleep as a boon to the rich man only, or send it merely to the noble and the great; He bestows it, as He does His sunshine, "on the evil and the good;" as He sends His rain, "on the just and the unjust." If there be a difference in the enjoyment of the blessing, that difference is on the side of the poor; for sweet is the sleep of the labouring man, of one who earns the boon by honest work and hard-wrought toil. Let us look on sleep as on every other blessing, as "coming down to us from above, from the Father

of lights," and we shall lay our heads upon our pillow with more thankfulness after the labour of the day, and rise in the morning with more gratitude after a night of tranquil slumber; for if God, to use the expression of David, were to "hold our eyes waking," in vain should we woo what has been so beautifully called

"Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep."

But it is not of natural "sleep" that I desire to speak—rather of the "sleep" which God "giveth to His beloved."

"His beloved." Who are they?

Let St. Paul's address to the Church at Rome supply the answer, "To all that be at Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints." "His beloved" are those whom He has "loved with an everlasting love," and drawn with lovingkindness to His feet. They return love for love. "We love Him because He first loved us." To such "He giveth sleep"—the sleep of a mind at peace with Him. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ." At peace with the Divine justice, which has been satisfied; with the Divine law, which has been fulfilled; with our own conscience, which, sprinkled with the Blood of Christ, has been "purged from dead works to serve the living God."

Do you know what it is to be at peace with God? Are you able to go to rest at night with the feeling that if you never wake again in this world, all is well between you and God? It was a saying of Sir Thomas

Browne: "Sleep is Death's younger brother; and so like him that I never dare trust him without my prayers." Brethren, how can you who are unreconciled to God, and unsaved,—how *can* you trust yourselves to sleep, when from that sleep there may be no waking here? How can you suffer yourselves to pass into a state of unconsciousness which may never be broken on this side the grave? I see a type of the sinner who goes to rest in false security in an incident in Saul's life, when pursuing David. As the king lies sleeping in his tent, with his spear stuck in the ground at his bolster, and Abner and the people lying round about him sunk in slumber, David and Abishai steal into the camp, and in an unguarded moment stand at the king's pillow. Abishai, with the weapon of death in his hand, says to David, "Let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the death; I will not smite him the second time." And the bloody deed had been done had not David interposed to save the life of the king. So with many of you. While you sleep, there is an enemy at your pillow. "In the midst of life we are in death." A clot of blood on the brain; an irregularity in the action of the heart; and we are in eternity. When a man retires to rest, it may be to sleep "the sleep that knows no waking." A perilous thing it is for one who has never repented of his sins to give sleep to his eyelids, or slumber to his eyes, for he may never see another morning. Before the day dawns, and the shadows flee away, he may be where he shall sleep no more for ever. With what different feelings may *he* commit himself to rest

who can say with David, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep, for Thou, Lord, only makest me to dwell in safety." How beautifully has the sleep of one at peace with God been represented in a well-known modern picture. The amphitheatre is crowded by a fierce and eager throng; tier after tier is lined with the cruel faces of those who have come there to see the Christian martyr torn to pieces by savage beasts. The arena is prepared. The hungry tiger leaps with impatient roar at the bars of his cage, thirsting for blood. A slave pushes back the doors of the cell where lies the man doomed to death for his adherence to Christ, that he may come forth, and with his dying agonies make sport for the emperor, his court, and the people. And what do you see there, as the door opens, and the cell of the martyr is disclosed? A youth sleeping peacefully, with the symbol of his faith clasped to his heart, and heaven's own sunshine resting on his face; for all is well between him and God. The death which he knew last night was to be met to-day has no terrors for him; he has made it "Christ to live," and shall find it "gain to die." Looking on that scene, we have a comment on the inspired verse, "Even so He giveth His beloved sleep."

Again, "God giveth His beloved sleep," the sleep of a quiet conscience. "Great peace have they that love Thy law," so says David. "The work of righteousness is peace," writes Isaiah. When men walk in the ways of God, and live in harmony with the Divine will, "then peace flows like a river,

and their righteousness as the waves of the sea;" and they know the meaning of the words: "In the keeping of His commandments there is great reward." In such a walk true holiness consists. For holiness does not lie in easily moved emotions, in fine feelings, in outward fervour, or a loud profession—no, not in these; but in the culture of all that belongs to a holy conversation; in the study and pursuit of whatsoever things are true, just, lovely, honourable, and of good report. It is only by a course of practical obedience, exemplifying the graces of the Christian character, that peace of conscience can be preserved. "The good man is satisfied from himself." Any permitted sin in a child of God cannot but disturb his inward peace, darken his conscience, and "pierce him through with many sorrows." "Herein do I exercise myself," says Paul, "to have always a conscience void of offence towards God, and towards men." "I will wash my hands in innocency," says David. "I will walk in mine integrity; my conscience shall not reproach me as long as I live." Well for him had it ever been so. But we all know how he fell; how idleness opened the door for lust, and how lust drew him into murder. His sin became a well-head of sorrow, unsealing for the rest of his days the bitter sources of anguish. "Thy hand is heavy upon me day and night," he cries; "my sore ran in the night season, and ceased not." His rest was disturbed, broken by an upbraiding conscience, and he watered his couch with his tears. A guilty conscience will spoil your pleasures, damp your mirth, and hush your

laughter. It will plant thorns in the softest pillow, and make the sinner restless on a bed of down. How different the sleep of a man whose conscience is at peace with God, and with itself! Would you see such sleep? Then look at Peter. It is the night before the morning on which he is to be brought forth to execution. Bound with two chains to two soldiers, thrust into the common prison, and reserved for death, Peter sleeps the sleep of a calm and trusting soul. His conscience is clear. He had done no evil. He could boldly say, "If it be right to serve God or man, judge ye;" and therefore he "laid him down and slept, for the Lord sustained him." "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "The strongest breastplate is a heart untainted;" and he who has "this rejoicing, the testimony of a good conscience," may rest secure in the midst of dangers; slumber though surrounded by foes; for even "so He giveth His beloved sleep."

God "giveth His beloved sleep,"—the sleep of trust in His providential care. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusteth in Thee." A mind stayed upon God! What a source of peace! Absolute trust in God frees him from care. It is because they lack a firm confidence in God that so many know nothing of that "contented mind" which is said to be "a continual feast." Restless and dissatisfied, they are ever saying, "Who will show us any good?" They ever thirst for something they have not got, crying, "If I had such and such an object; such and such a

pleasure; this gain or that enjoyment, how happy and satisfied I should be!" They are like children always crying after a new toy; sometimes even crying for the moon! Oh, ye that are spending your "money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not," do ye really think that there is satisfaction in anything outside God? Satisfied! It cannot be. "Give, give, give," is the demand of the worldly heart, and would be the same though you were to cast a thousand worlds before it. It is like the grave, always craving for more, and which never says, "It is enough."

And what cares press upon the hearts of men who have no trust in God! What anxiety about the future sits with dull and leaden weight on their breast, and robs them of their peace. Many a man would have sounder and more refreshing slumber, if he would only make God his trust, and, turning to Him with all his heart, would thankfully acknowledge the truth that his "times are in God's hands," if he would only learn to act on the privilege of "casting all his care upon Him who careth for us." The heart which is filled with a strong faith in God cannot easily have its peace disturbed. It will be kept from repining at what God does, and from impatience at what God does not. It will confide and wait; it will believe and be thankful; it will rest and hope; it will suffer and be satisfied. It was so with St. Paul. He is in nakedness and fasting; in cold and hunger; he is now under the Roman scourge; now under the Jews' stripes; now in the

dungeon; now in the deep. What does he say? "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content." And he who through God's grace has learned, perhaps only after a long time and much hard experience, the same happy lesson, freed from the world's corroding and cankering cares, may lie down in peace at night, and rest, fearing no evil, his head pillowed on the bosom of Jesus, and himself enfolded in the everlasting arms. "Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord;" for "even so He giveth His beloved sleep."

But we may take the words in a higher, a sublimer meaning still, and refer them to the Christian's death.

For a believer in Christ, death is now transformed and transfigured into a sleep. It is God's gift; a gift which He gives to those whom He holds most dear. Death is not now "the king of terrors," the unwelcome intruder, but the gracious messenger to release us from pain and sorrow, and soothe us into rest. For, after all is said, the believer's peace will never be so perfect as not at times to be disturbed by troubles and fears; the memories of sins; the clouding of God's face; and the believer's slumber never so sound as not to be broken by fears and anxieties, by pain and sickness, and by

"Sad dreams that through the eyelids creep,"

and which we have "no time to charm away." But when the head is laid on the bosom of Jesus in the death-sleep, there will be perfect rest, and

"Never doleful dream again
Shall break the happy slumber, when
He giveth His beloved sleep."

"After life's fitful fever, they sleep well," is true of those who, being "absent from the body," are "present with the Lord." Dying in the Lord, they rest from their labours; they have no more warfare against sin and Satan, nor inward struggles or assaults of temptation, no more bitterness of heart, nor iron entering into the soul; all these things are passed away for ever.

How such a thought should correct our estimate of a Christian's death! "The righteous are taken from the evil to come." Our language when we hear of the death of God's servants is too often this: "Alas! my brother; alas! my sister." Or the world says, "Poor fellow! He's gone! So early dead!" We pity where we ought to envy; we condole where we ought to congratulate. Is it a cause for regret that the weather-beaten mariner has passed out of the storm, and is at rest in the sheltered haven where he would be? Is it a source of sorrow that the worn and wearied traveller, who toiled long through the heat and burden of the day, has reached his happy home at last? Is it a cause for regret that for the tired soldier the hardships, and wounds, and watchings of the warfare are all over, that he has laid down his arms, thrown aside his armour, and put on instead the white raiment of everlasting peace? Let us feel satisfied that God's estimate is the true one, and that when a believer dies, his death is "gain."

Death could not be a gift, a gift from God to His beloved, were it not, at the time when it is given, better than life; and we ought, therefore, never to speak of the untimely death, the premature death, of the saints of God. Christ, who "went down to the dark realm of shadows," and returned from it again, wears the keys of Hades and of Death at His girdle, and He opens and shuts them at His will, and He never opens them for His people till the proper time has come. Then he draws near, "loosing the silver cord, and breaking the golden bowl at the fountain." "He giveth His beloved sleep."

Yes, to His beloved. To none else. None else have peace with God, a quiet mind, confidence in His love; none but those whose life is "hidden with Christ in God." Oh, brethren, let your hearts seek Christ, and your souls cleave to Him. God grant that all of us, every one of us, may through grace be able to say, "To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." "Whether we live, may we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, may we die unto the Lord;" and then, living or dying, we shall be the Lord's. Then our last hours shall be comforted by the presence of God, and our last resting-place shall be under the shadow of His wings. And then, when the tossing arms lie still, and the aching head is at rest, and the lines of suffering and sickness have melted away from the face, may the tears of the friends who gather round the bed where we lie be stayed by this happy thought, as, looking upon us, they say, "Even so He giveth His beloved sleep!"

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